

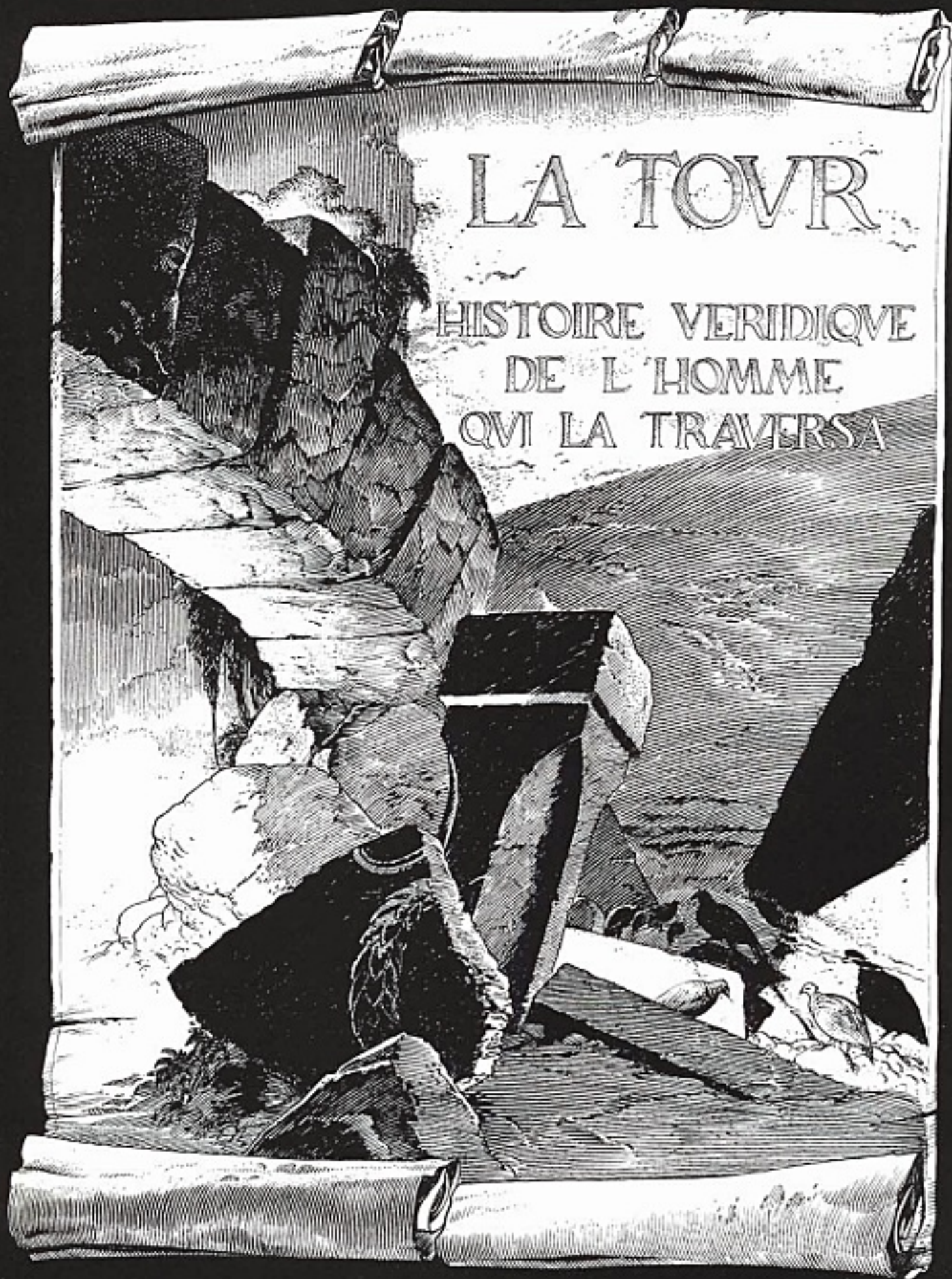
Les Cités obscures

SCHUITEN

PEETERS

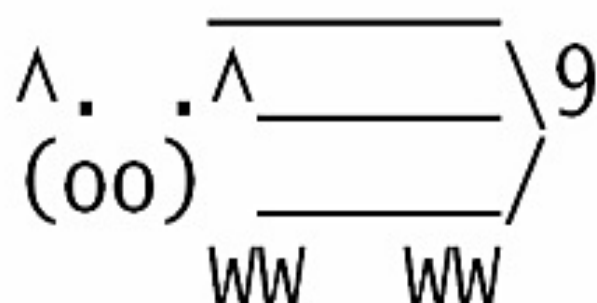
The Tower





The Tower - A truthful tale of one man's journey

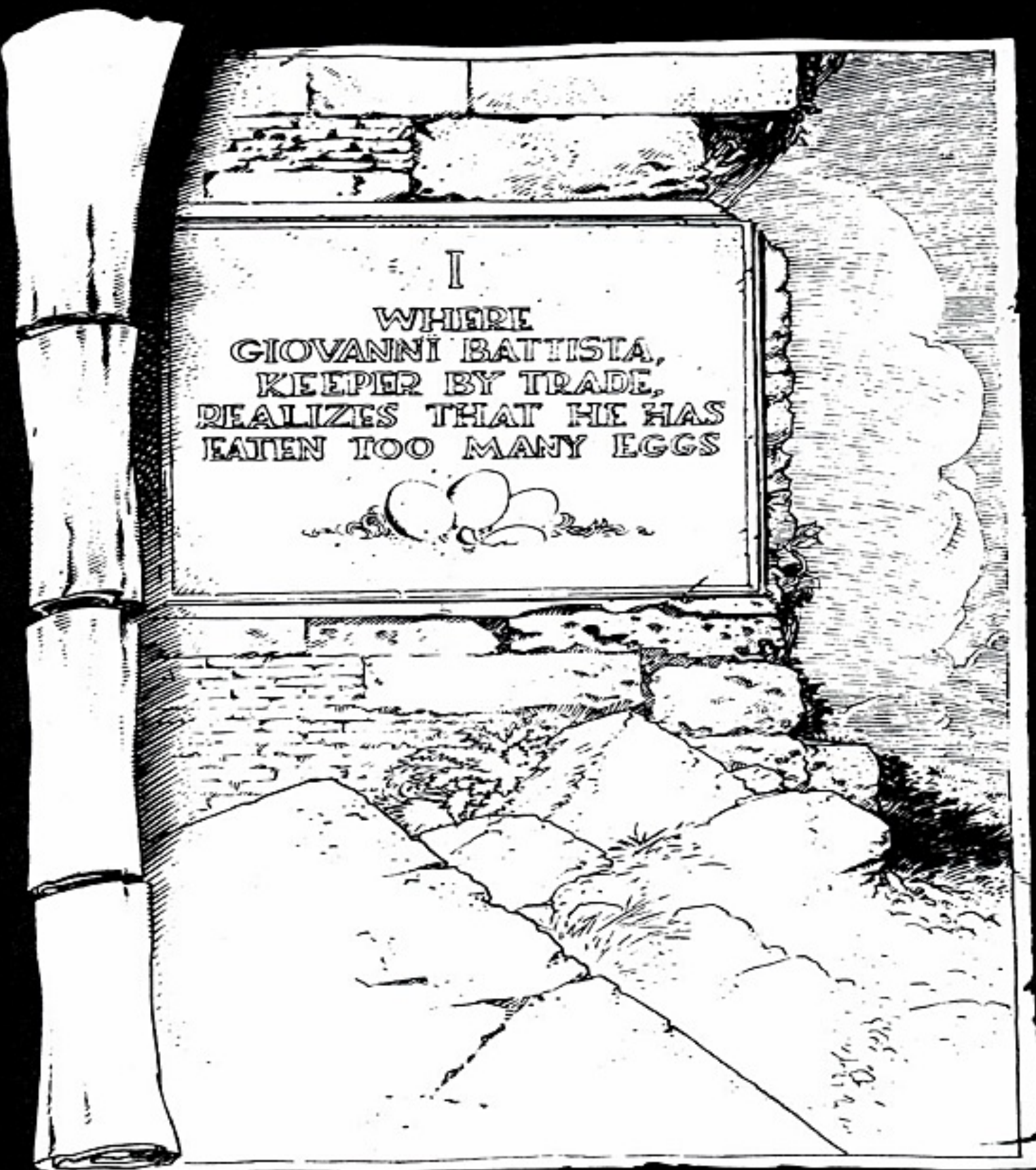
MAUS IS IN DA HAUS



CREDITS

SCANS (FROM CHEVAL NOIR)
ISSUE #9 - DARWINATION & PROMETHEVS
ISSUE #10 - SHINY BEASTS (DCP)
ISSUE #11 - DARWINATION & PROMETHEVS
ISSUE #12 - DTS (MINUTEMEN)
ISSUE #13 - DARWINATION & PROMETHEVS
ISSUE #14 - DARWINATION & CRUMB TASTER

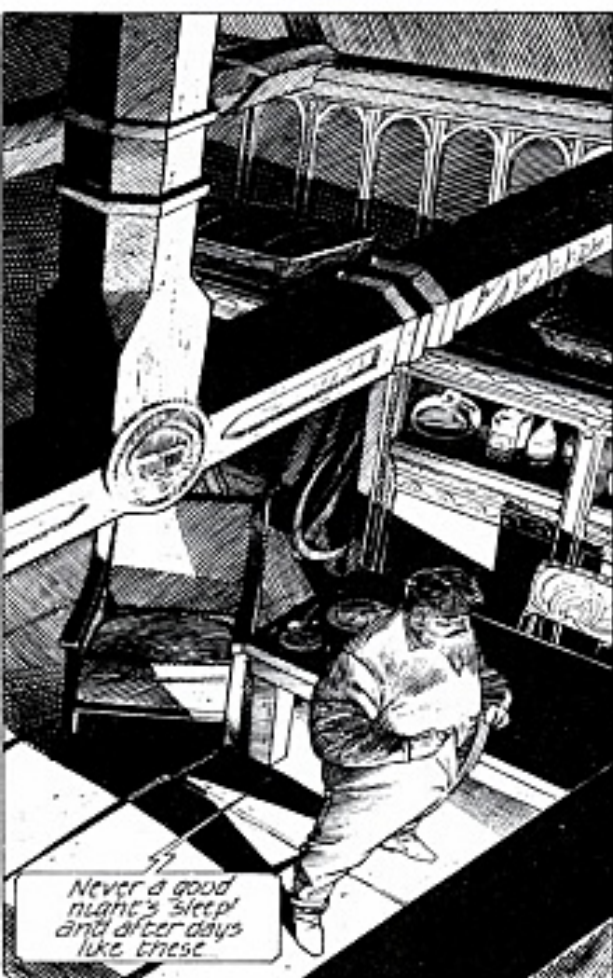
THE TOWER

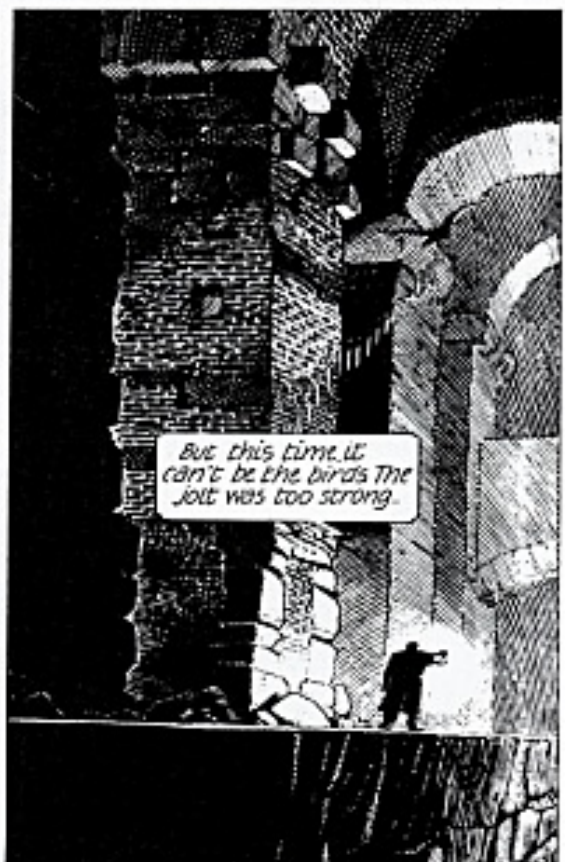


I
WHERE
GIOVANNI BATTISTA,
KEEPER BY TRADE,
REALIZES THAT HE HAS
EATEN TOO MANY EGGS

BY

SCHUITEN & PEETERS









I'll patch it together somehow.



This mortar's really too old.



No wonder the stones keep falling, one by one.



What a fool I am!



Why do I kill myself to do a good job when the rest of them don't do their fair share?



Better be careful! Don't want the whole thing collapsing now!



Done! Looks like today's not the day old Giovanni cashes in his chips!



When the devil are they going to send me new supplies?



It was worth it anyway. There were other stories that were going to come down soon.



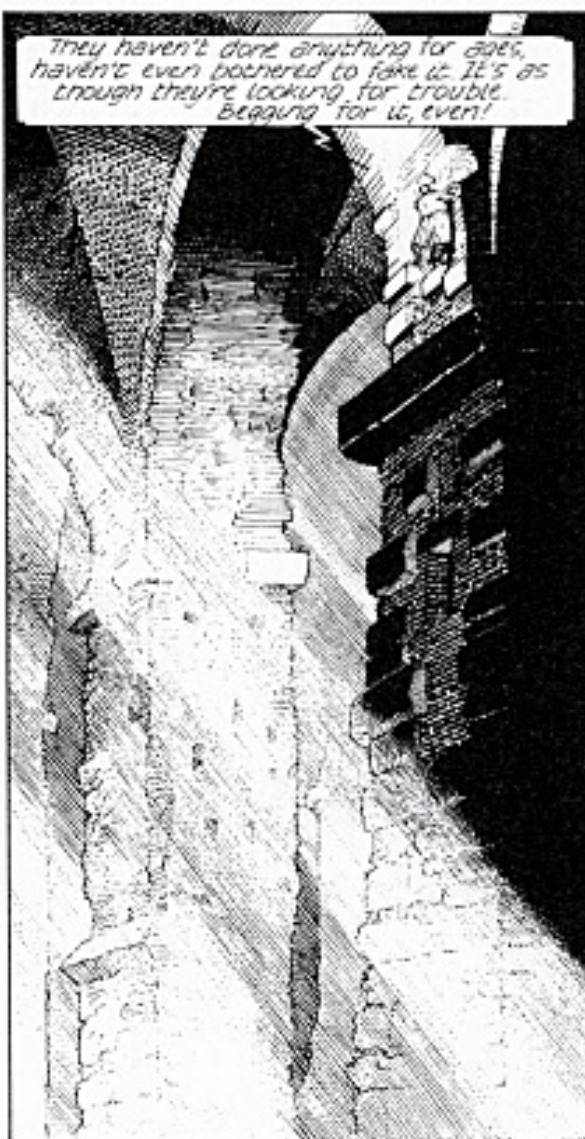
In any case, the Inspector's bound to come soon. Tomorrow maybe, or the next day. Lucky for me.



But not for everyone! This time, heads are going to roll! But it's only fair...



The others better not come crying to me about it either! It's not like they didn't know it would happen.



They haven't done anything for ages, haven't even bothered to fake it. It's as though they're looking for trouble. Begging for it, even!



Let the Inspector come!
I'm ready for him!



I'm not worried about
his visit. On the contrary,
I'm not afraid of telling
him exactly what
I think!

Bless my soul! It's
easier climbing up
than coming down!



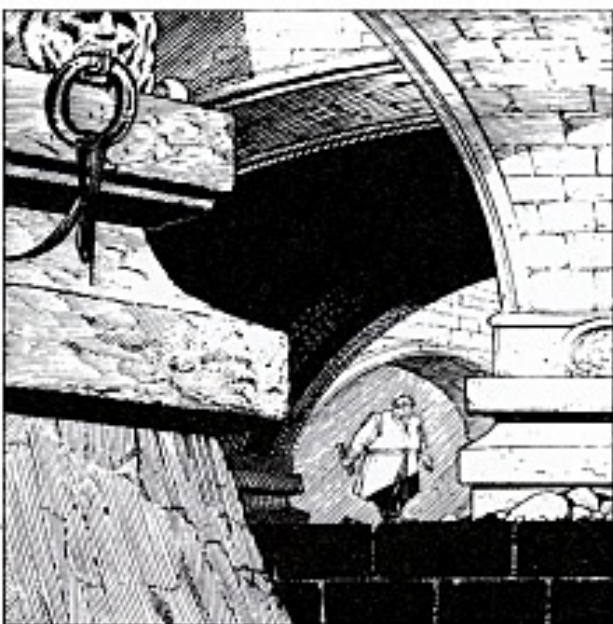
I'm sure he'll be
here tomorrow, or maybe
the next day. Before the
full moon, in any case...

Fortunately,
everything seems
normal here!



It's been such a long time
since he's come. He won't
be much longer. He's going
to have a real job in front
of him, too. I wouldn't
want to be in his shoes.





Hmm... let's see...



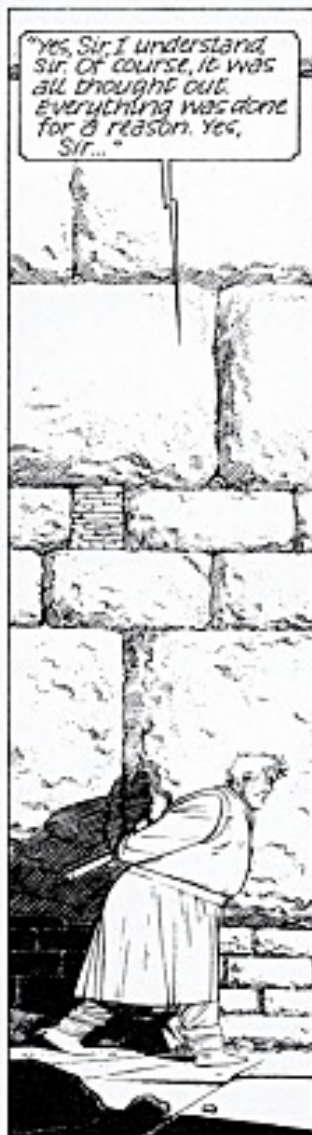
That column doesn't look too strong. I'll have to reinforce it, as soon as I find the time.



Being a Keeper's a tough job! The construction was good enough, no doubt about that, but the passage of time makes everything so much harder to maintain...



"If I might be allowed a small observation, Mister Inspector, Sir, the maintenance sectors may be too large..."



"Yes, Sir. I understand, Sir. Of course, it was all thought out. Everything was done for a reason. Yes, Sir..."



Look at all of these damn vines eating into the stones! And they're strong enough to cut your hands...

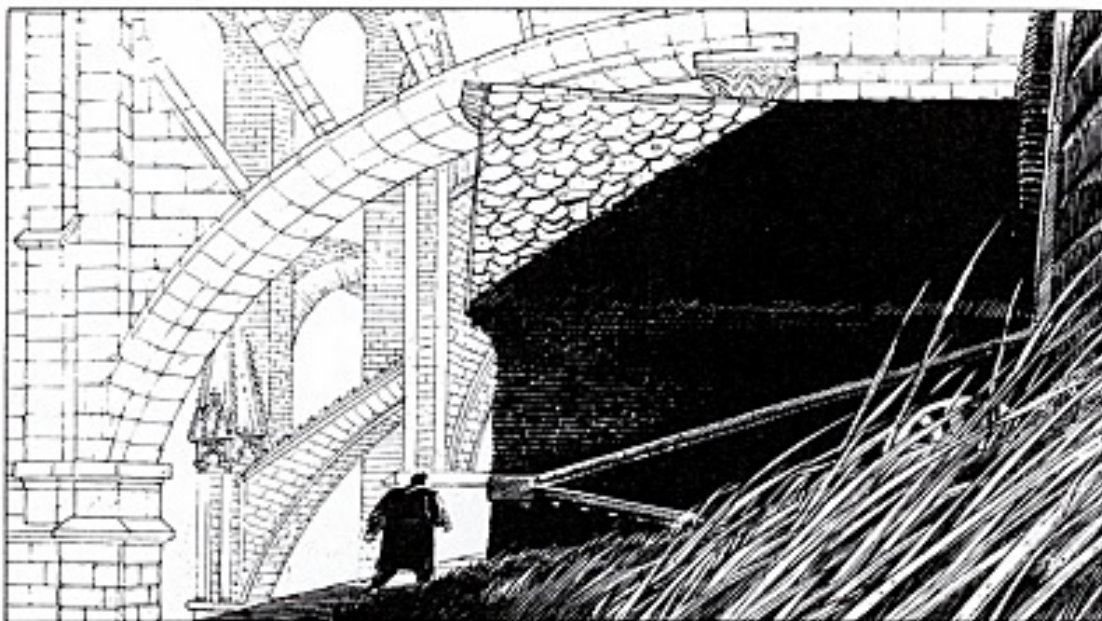


Look at the time! I think I'll stop and finish tomorrow...











No, there's no other way! I'll have to go down. Ah! I can hear them already. "You're a Keeper Giovanni! you shouldn't have left your post! You should have waited for the Inspector instead of trying to do his job. Are you saying we don't know what we're doing?"



"The Tower is in perfect condition, you've got nothing to worry about. It's just that further construction demands all our attention. We don't have the time to mollycoddle you Keepers. And that's what you want, admit it!"



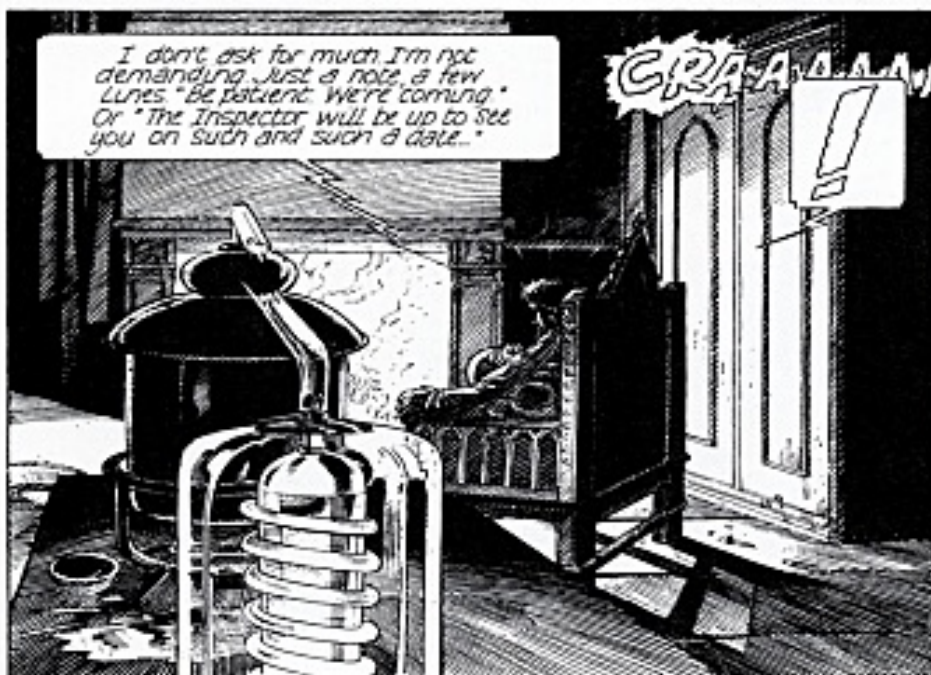
"So just go back to your post, where you belong. There's certainly been some damage since you left. Do you think we pay you to wander around aimlessly?"



Pay me! That's a laugh! If they'd at least answer my letters occasionally. But there hasn't been a word. It's as if they'd ceased to exist...



I don't ask for much. I'm not demanding. Just a note, a few lines. "Be patient. We're coming." Or "The Inspector will be up to see you on such and such a date..."



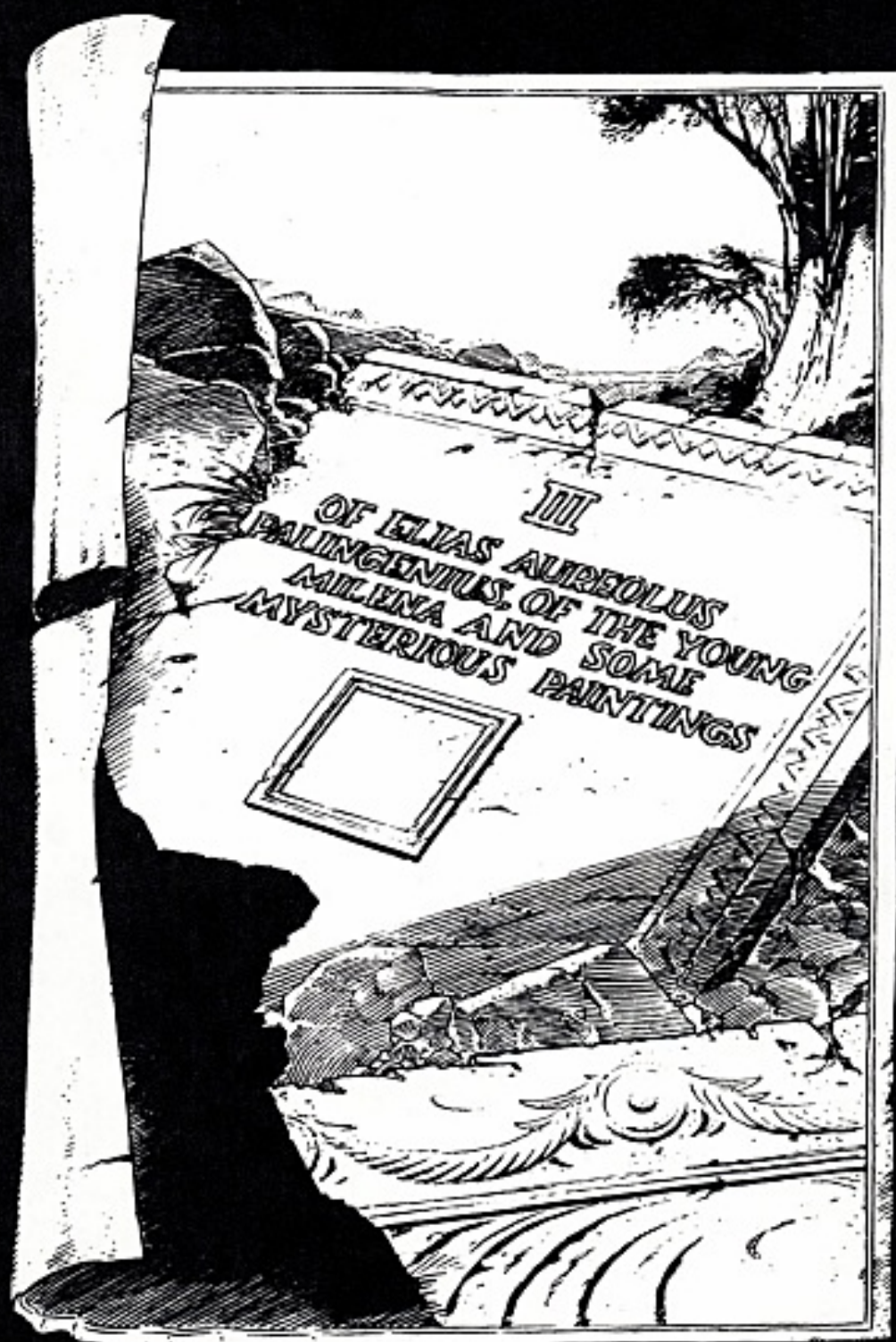
CRAAAAAA!



Giovanni, old man let them chew you out! You're leaving tomorrow morning anyway!

• TO BE CONTINUED... •

THE TOWER

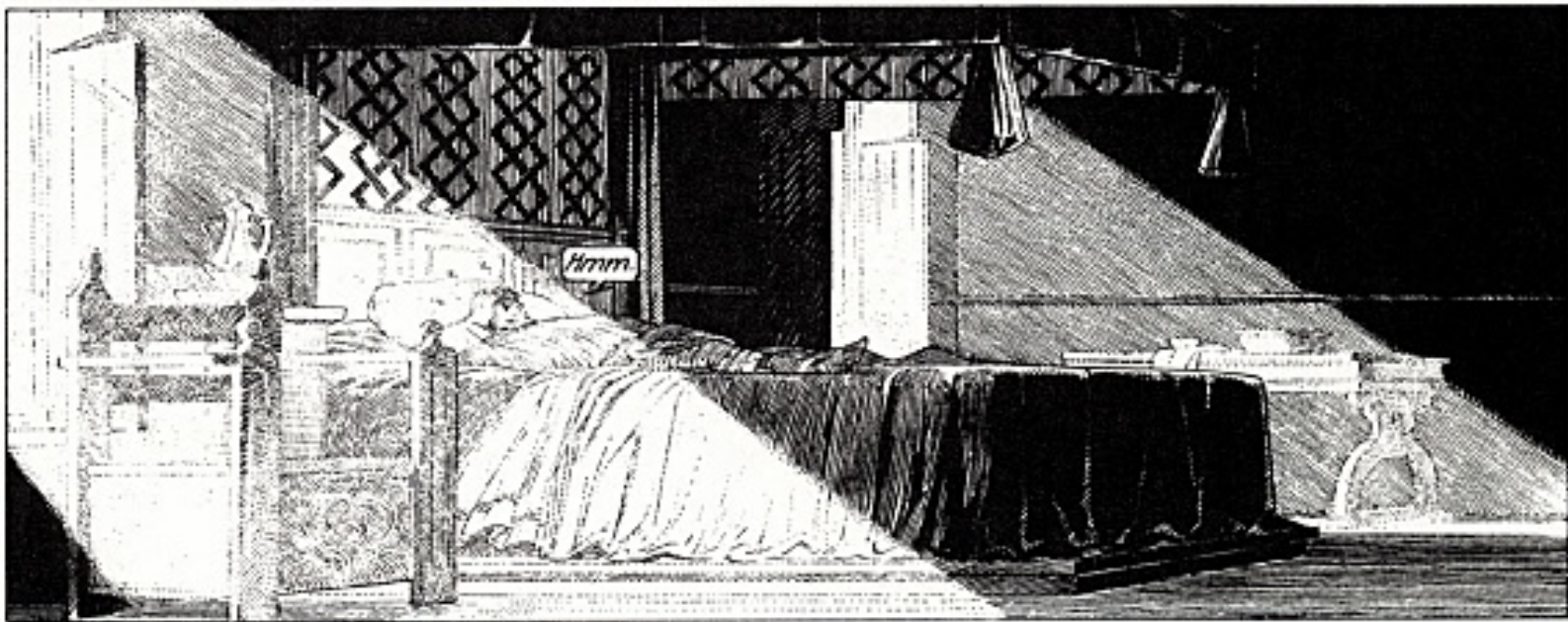


The Tower...

A structure shrouded in mystery and misinformation. Giovanni Battista, keeper by trade, cares little for these secrets, however. His concern is only for the sector of the Tower which is in his charge, a place that is rapidly falling apart.

Determined not to sit idly by, Giovanni sets off in search of the Inspector he always expects—but never sees. In an attempt to speed his journey, Giovanni builds a makeshift glider and makes an ill-fated flight up one side of the Tower. His glider is damaged and Giovanni falls towards the inky blackness at the base of the Tower...







You're with the Pioneers, aren't you? If you knew how happy I am to have made it!



The Pioneers? No, I'm afraid not. But perhaps you wouldn't mind if I asked who you are?



I'm Giovanni Battista. I'm responsible for the...

Battista? Isn't that interesting? Hold on a second!



Ah, I see! Giovanni Battista, Keeper, 3rd degree, Ortelius sector!



3rd degree! Are you making fun of me, Sir? If my leg wasn't banged up, I'd...



Now, Now, Battista, calm down! It's been a long time since any Keeper was promoted to the 2nd degree. You are a remarkable case! A living symbol of the Tower! One of the original 500 keepers, and one that has been at his post the longest...



You're the new Inspector, aren't you? What luck that I've finally found you!



No, my friend, I'm sorry to disappoint you. I am Elias Aureolus Pallingerius, doctor of bodies and souls, merchant of dreams and knowledge, specialist of the stars and metals, and most especially, possessor of the Tower's secrets!



Tell me, my dear Battista, it was a most curious voyage that brought you here. Why did you leave your sector?

I know I shouldn't have, but you see...

No need to justify yourself! I'm not checking up on you. As I told you, I'm not this Inspector that you kept mumbling about in your delirium!

There are at least a dozen people waiting for you at the door, Elias.

Giovanni, I'd like to introduce you to Milena. You should thank her. She was looking through my spy glass when she saw you fall. At first, I didn't want to believe her—the idea of a new Icarus seemed too absurd—but she finally convinced me, and the two of us went down to the edge of our sector. That's where we found you, entangled in your strange conception!

I don't know how to thank you, Miss. I'm sure I was quite a nuisance.

Yes, well, you were awfully heavy to carry around!

Milena! Please!

Ah, there you are, Milena! Come and greet our guest, Mr. Giovanni Battista! A fossil, a curiosity, one of the last keepers of this blasted tower.

The clients are getting impatient, Elias.

The moon is full today, and they all want to see it! Make them wait a bit longer! And tell them to calm down!

There's something that still intrigues me, Giovanni. You remained at your post for more than thirty years. What made you suddenly decide to leave your sector and fly off on such a risky expedition?

Ah, but I see you can't keep your eyes open. I'm wrong to pester you with questions...

Already sound asleep. Quite a character, this one...



So, the dead awake!

I feel much better now. I must have been exhausted to have slept for so long.



Unless it's the lack of food that made me so weak. I wouldn't mind eating something...



Here, this will put a little meat on your bones you poor starving creature!



This, er, is a lovely dress my dear!



Don't touch! Do you have any idea how old I am?

How old? Well, I...



Doesn't matter! I've never found out myself. But your hands are dirty and your breath is bad! Don't you ever bathe?



Where I live, we don't...

Well, you live here now! Just hold on, and I'll get you a jug of water. Don't think you can escape...









There he is!



So, you are this famous Keeper?

Er, yes, I am...

A Keeper? I thought they'd been gone for ages!



No need to look at me as if I was the devil incarnate! I'm Nicolas Valentine and I own that tavern over there. It's the busiest one in town...



We don't see many interesting strangers around here. Come on, let me buy you a drink!

Well, I...

Later! First, we've got to finish our tour!



He's a real pain I've never been able to stand him!

Everything looks so well maintained. Being a Keeper here must be a real cinch.



This large crowd must make you feel dizzy.

Bah! There are lots of people in my sector too. I have a wonderful crew and they all worked hard. And there are many beautiful women there, too!



Liar! Everyone knows that all the Keepers are bachelors! When was the last time you saw a woman?







Let's go back. I don't want to meet another one like him!

Already? All right if that's what you want.



The door's open. I wonder what?



So, there you are my dear Battistera! I was looking for you! I'm glad you're up and about.



I was just going to rest, in fact. That girl wore me out.

Milena? What a personality! I'm so happy to have her here with me. So, Giovanni, let's continue where we left off yesterday.







Gentlemen, the tour is over. That will be twelve crowns!



So, you want to see the paintings too, Giovanni? All you need to do is ask...

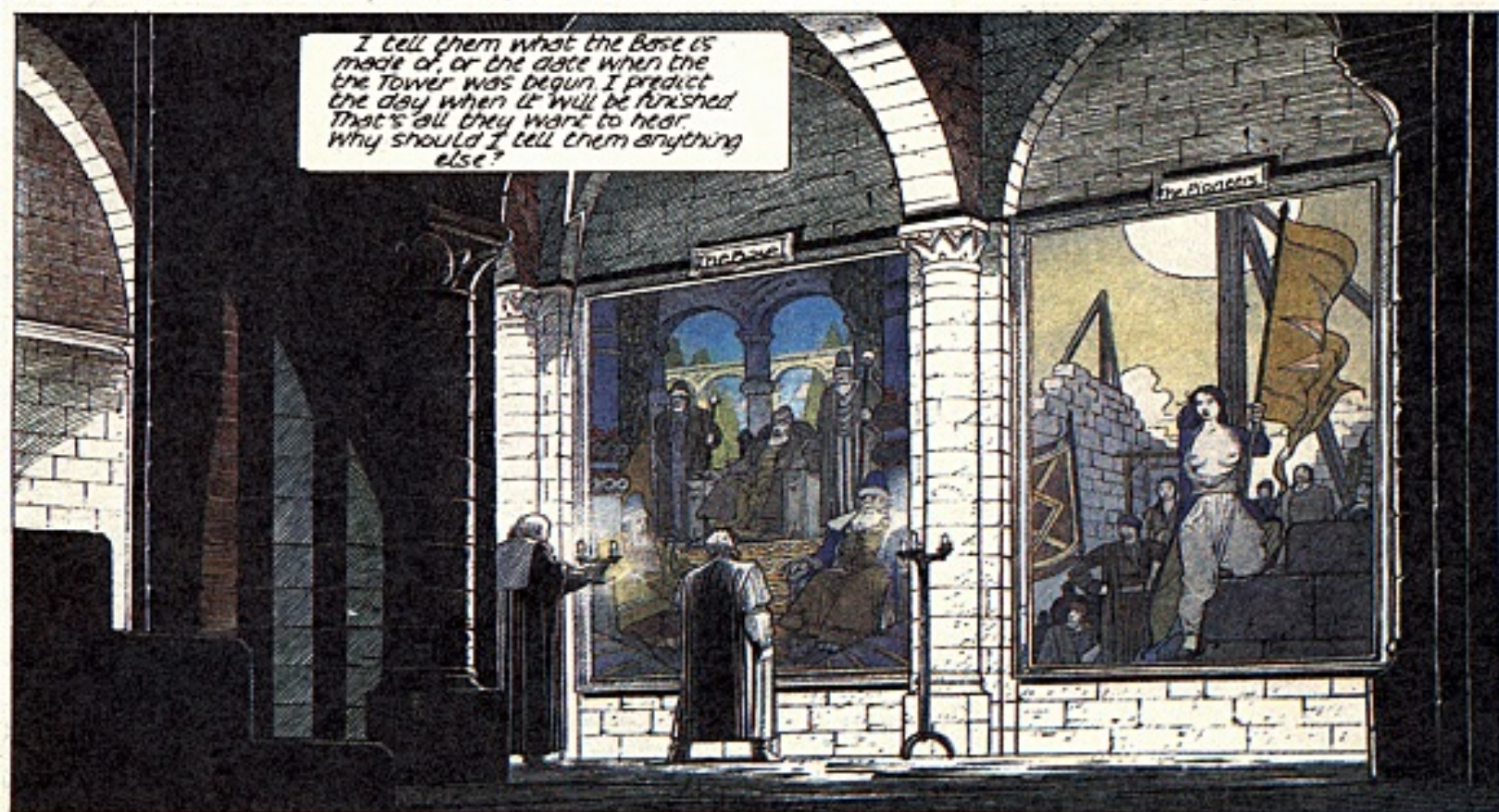
What? No, I just... Er...



Come along, I'll show you everything.



You see, Giovanni, others earn their living by baking bread or cutting stones. I do it by talking. Talk, talk. I don't know how to do anything else.

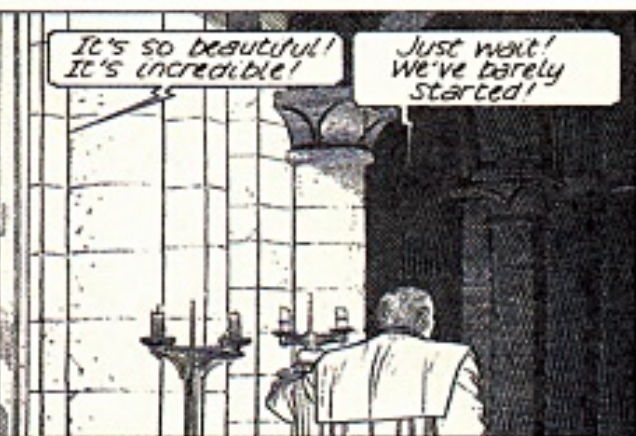


I tell them what the Base is made of, or the date when the Tower was begun. I predict the day when it will be finished. That's all they want to hear. Why should I tell them anything else?



*It's so beautiful!
It's incredible!*

*Just wait!
We've barely
started!*

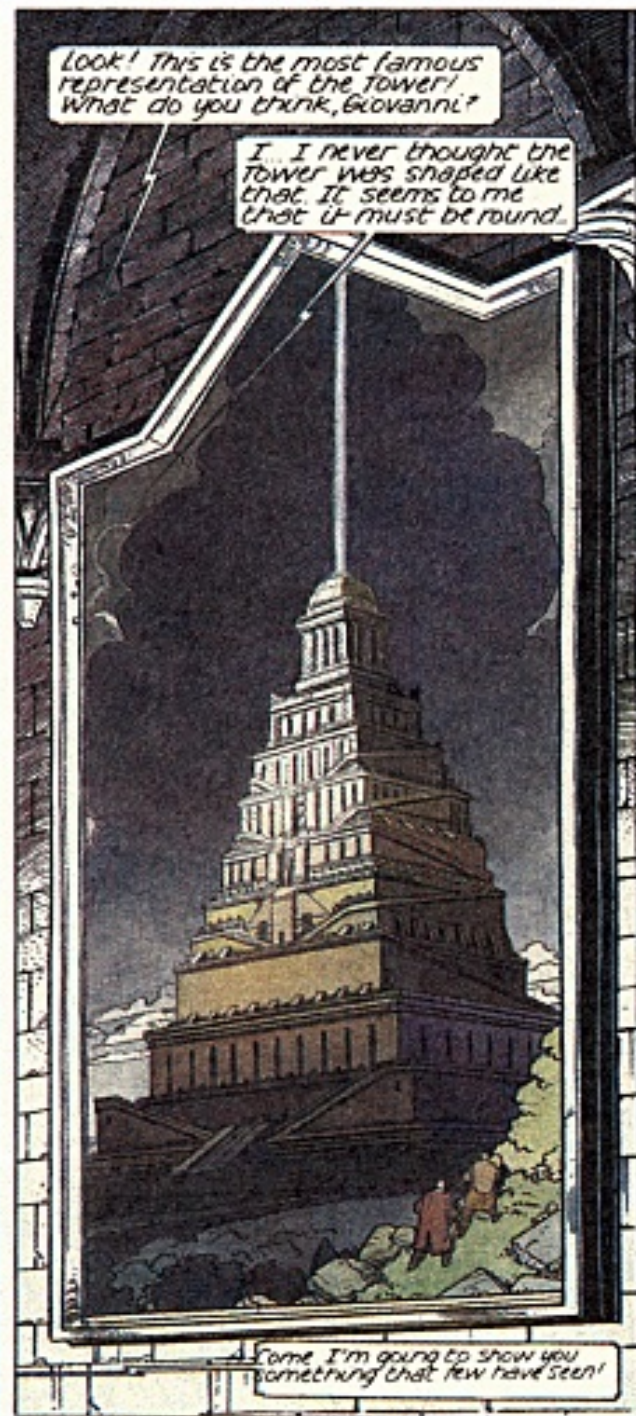


*During your childhood, they
must have told you about the
wars that used to devastate
our continent. The Tower was
built to put an end to that.*

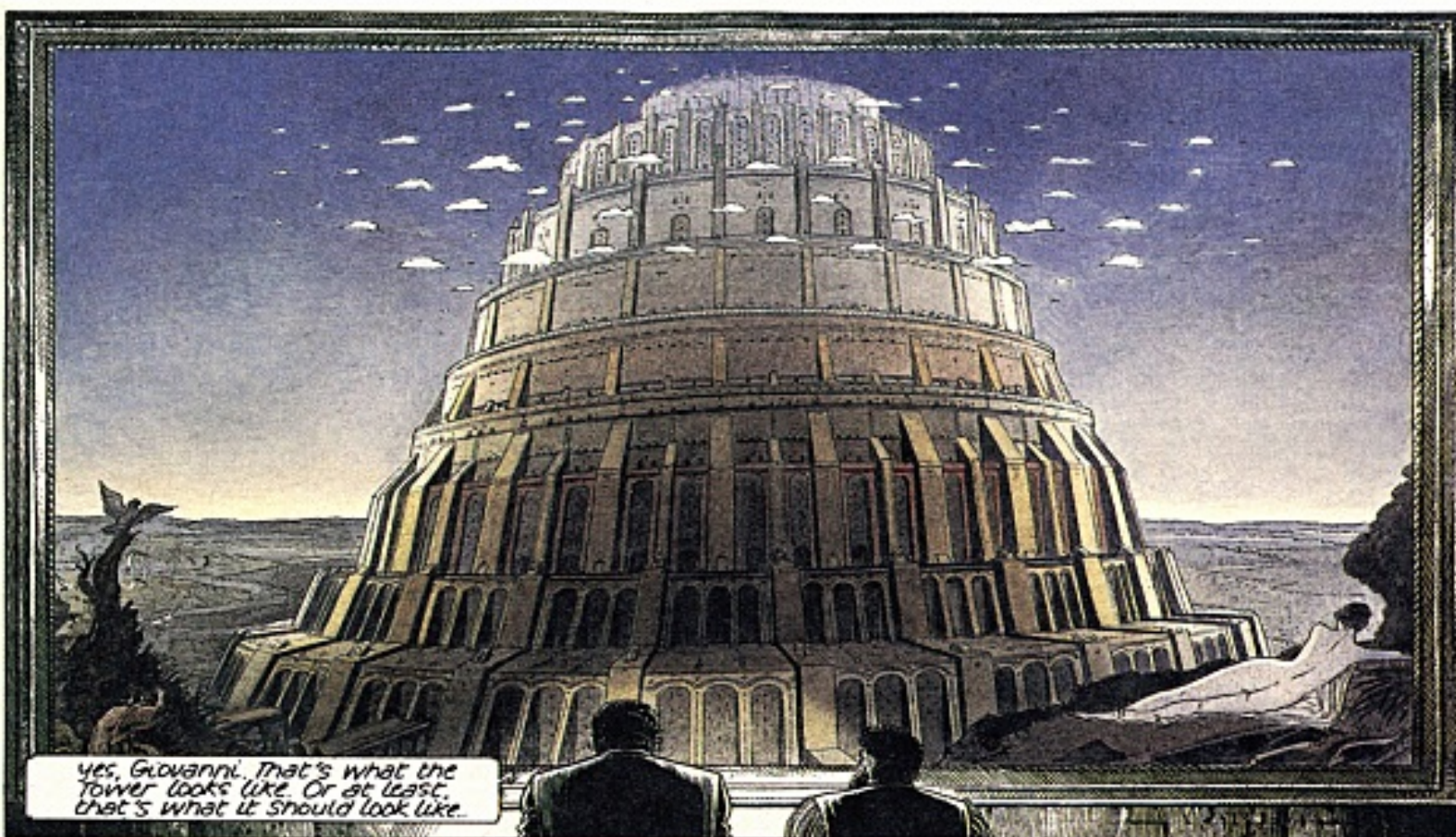


*Look! This is the most famous
representation of the Tower!
What do you think, Giovanni?*

*I... I never thought the
Tower was shaped like
that. It seems to me
that it must be round.*



*Come, I'm going to show you
something that few have seen!*



yes, Giovanni. That's what the Tower looks like. Or at least, that's what it should look like.

Who is this woman?

She symbolizes the new world that was to be born with the Tower!



Funny, reminds me of a woman I once knew but a symbol, she wasn't!



I tell you, Giovanni, I'm worried. Something serious is happening to the Tower. My apprehension has gotten stronger during the last few days.

I want to understand, Elias. I want to learn the truth about the Tower.

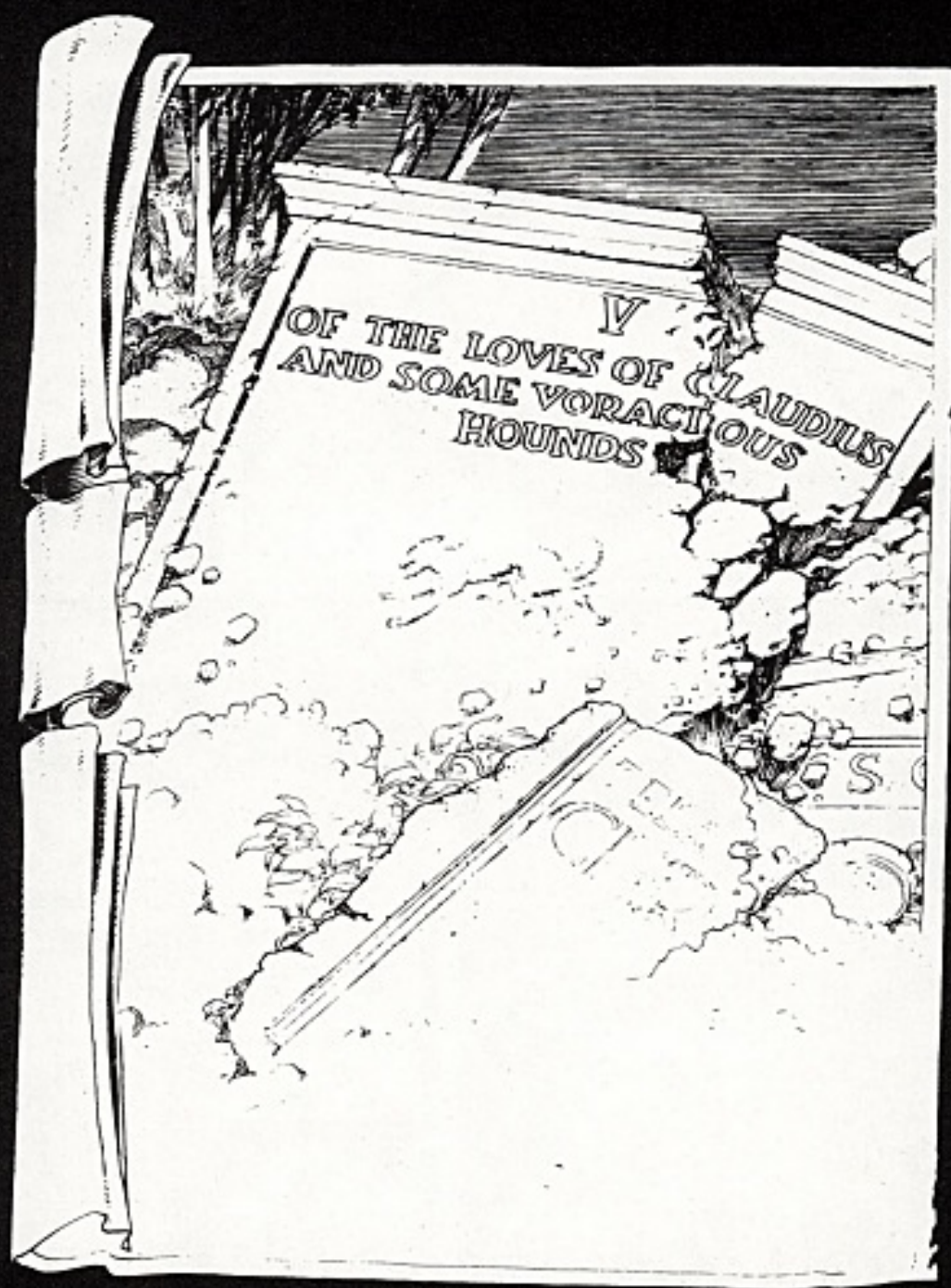


you will, Giovanni. I know you will. And long before me...



• TO BE CONTINUED... •

THE TOWER



BY

SCHUITEN & PEETERS



Dear Elias,
I decided to take notes for
you on each step of the journey
which you deserved to have
taken in our place...



We left on the fifth day of the
first quarter, waiting for the
cover of night, so that we
would run less risk of being
noticed...



We first crossed the rocks that
you'd pointed out to me on our
last walk, then, a narrow wall
enabled us to cross the abyss...



Come on, it's just
a little wall!

Too little!



My lantern! I dropped my
Lantern!

We'll manage with-
out it. Come towards
me. Don't be afraid!



Great! you made it!

I hope that the
whole trip won't
be like this!



As soon as we set foot on the other side,
our troubles began. There were many
obstacles. It was impossible to go further
with only one lantern. We decided to
sleep as best we could.

Stop being
such a
sour puss!



Blast!



Ha! Ha! Ha!



All right! we'll stop
here for the night!



Wake up, Giovanni!
Look! There are
ruins everywhere...



Nobody. And not
one wall still
whole!

It looks a little
like my old
sector...

How is something like
this possible? How
could it come to this?



They must have been
so eager to build the
upper levels that they
forgot those below.
What a mistake!
Without the keepers,
the tower is a farce!



There was nothing more to see there,
so we continued on our journey...

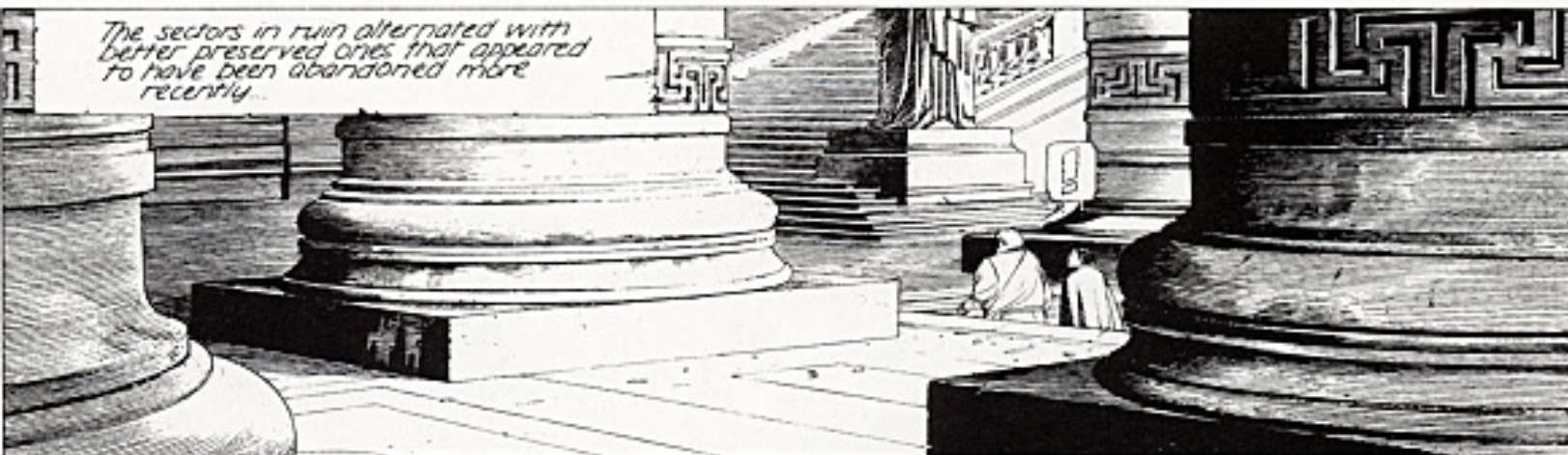


Several hours later, we came upon some
strange constructions that looked like
nothing I had ever seen before...

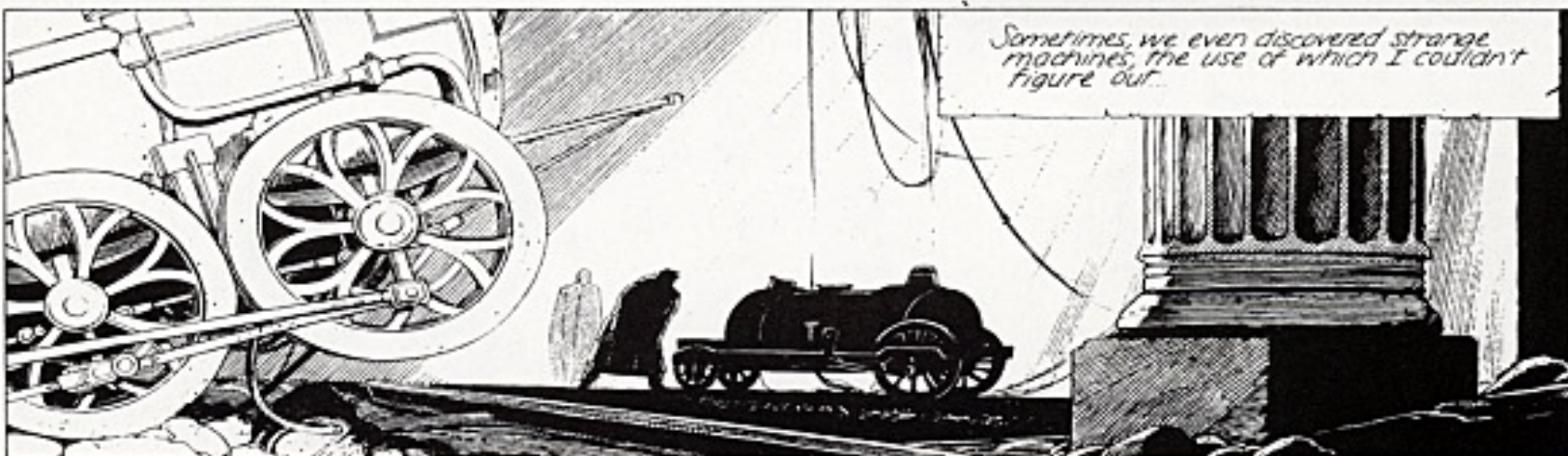




The sectors in ruin alternated with better preserved ones that appeared to have been abandoned more recently.



Sometimes, we even discovered strange machines, the use of which I couldn't figure out.



For three days, we walked. With the exception of a few birds, we didn't see another living thing. Then, one evening...



Giovanni!
Look up there!

The shapes fled hurriedly. I wanted to go after them but...



Why hurry? We shouldn't wear ourselves out chasing a gang of cowards!

But there may still be some people living above. I have to admit, I wouldn't mind meeting some of my colleagues.





Milena was right to be suspicious. The spectacle that awaited us at the top did not make me anxious to confront those responsible for it!



Get back if you don't want to feel my stick, you filthy beast!



I'm scared, Giovanni. I should never have come with you! The tower is nothing like the paintings!



It's my fault. I never should have brought you. Come along, I'll take you back to Elias.

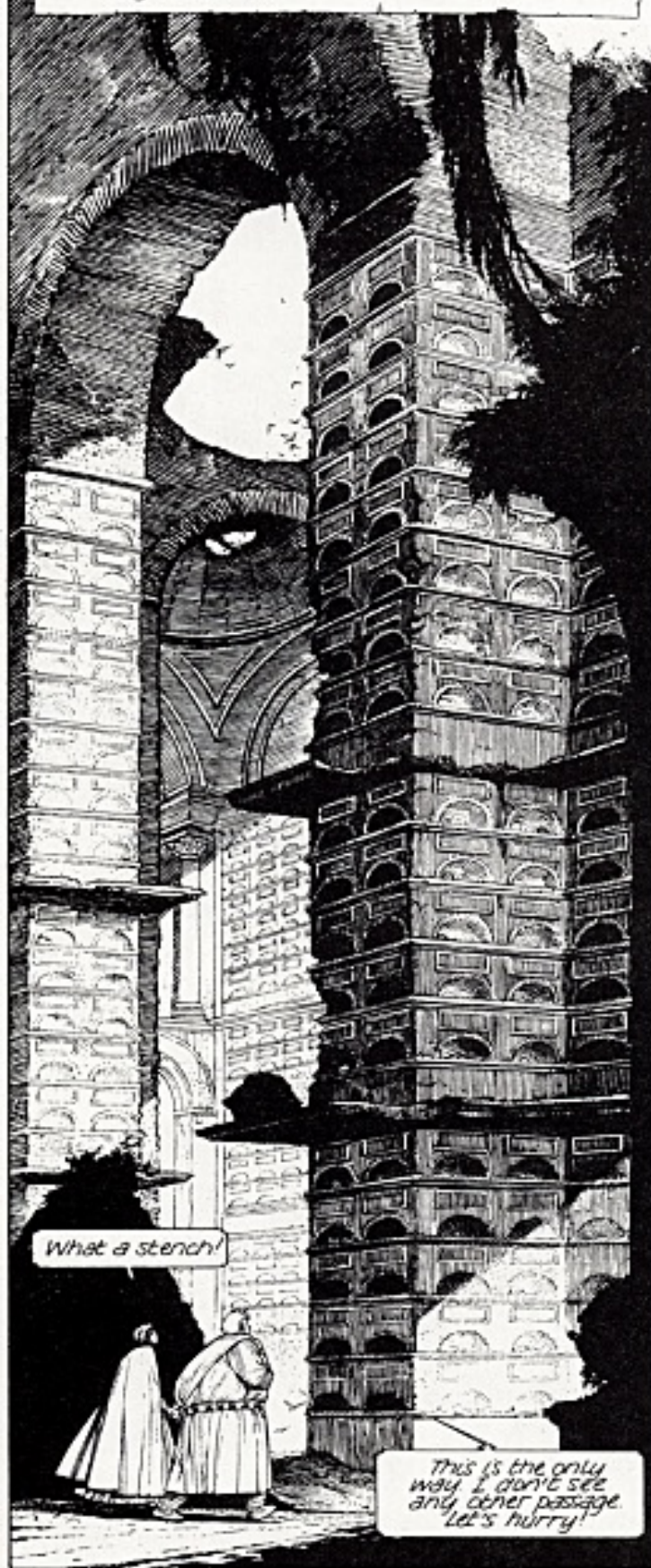
No! I won't leave you. I don't want to return to our sector.



Then let's go. There's nothing more for us here.



We continued our bizarre journey with less and less idea of what lay ahead...



What a stench!

This is the only way I don't see any other passage. Let's hurry!



But, they're...

Yes Bones. It's called an ossuary...



Who were all these people?

Some of the Tower's workers. They died without ever seeing their achievement, maybe without even knowing what they built.



Courage! We're almost there!



Stop! Step any closer and you're dead!



Get back! I know that you've come here to steal it!

Calm down, my friend! We have no intention to steal anything!



It's no use lying! There's only one machine in this sector that's still working, and I'll die before letting you have it!



We don't want your machine. We're simple voyagers. All we want is...

Voyagers? Are you headed to see the Pioneers?



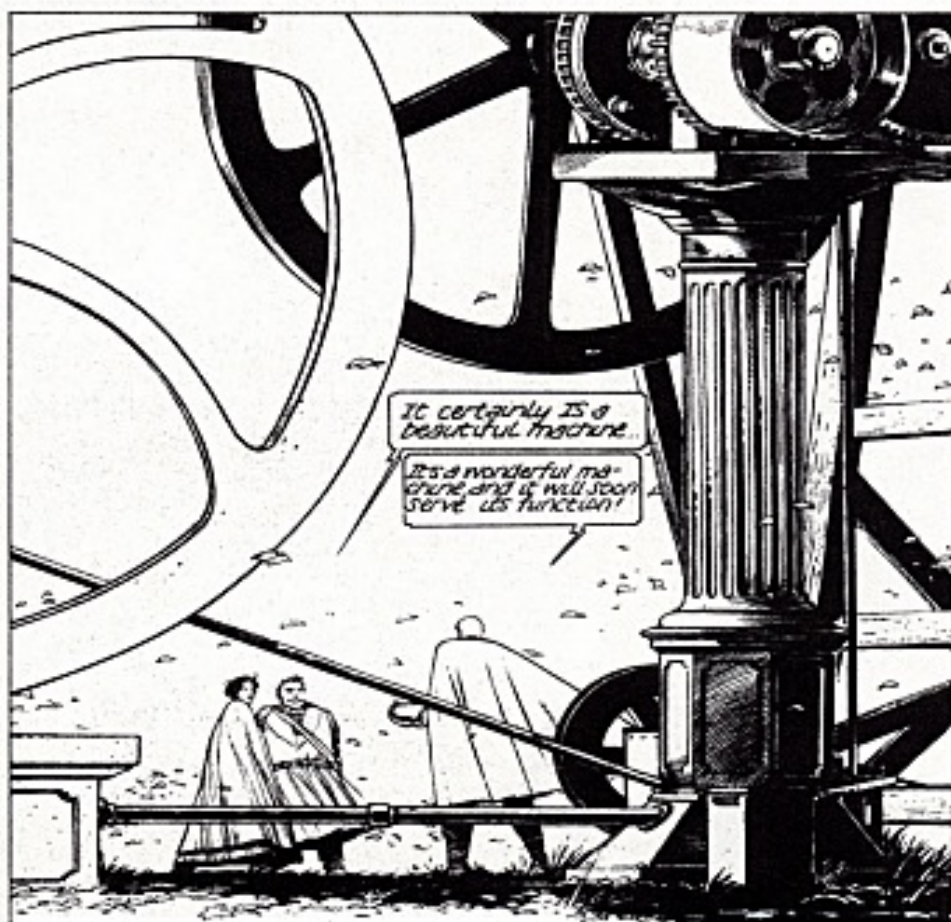
Yes, indeed!

Then tell them you've seen Claudius, and the repairs are done. Tell them I'm just awaiting their orders!



It certainly is a beautiful machine.

It's a wonderful machine, and it will soon serve its function!



What function? Please tell us!





Well, it's... That is...
I... How can I explain?
WATCH IT! Don't come
too close!



Don't be silly, man! What possible
use can your machine be in the
middle of such a mess? Look
around, for God's sake! There's not
a single wall still holding! And
there's no danger of your neighbors
down below stealing it!



Do you truly believe that
all your lies will make me
abandon my wonderful
machine? Just because this
sector is going through a
difficult period doesn't
mean I'm ready to go back
on my trust!



Let's hear it!
What's been
going on here?

Foolish girl! First, the
iron workers tried to
destroy what the
builders had wrought,
then out of spite, they
demolished the carpen-
ters' work! But me, I
stay on! I refuse to
leave! I'm the conscience
of the tower!



But it's over my
friends! It's time for
you to pack up and go!

Ah!
So you say!



The conscience of the
tower? He's mad!

Probably so, but
maybe not so much
more than we...





The days passed and we encountered no one else. But we were still very far from the end of our journey...



We walked on interminably, slowed time and time again by detours, dead ends and obstacles. The weather continued to worsen...



There was no sign of the top. It seemed to us that we would never reach it, that the Tower soared through infinity to the very heavens...



Our enthusiasm was exhausted long before our provisions. Yes, Elias, more than once we dreamt of quitting, of laying down and waiting for the merciful cold to bring us oblivion...





But each morning, we set out again, hoping that, by rightfall, we would reach the Pioneers...

Courage! This time I'm sure! We'll be there once we're over this wall...

The stone is fragile! Better use the rope knot it around your waist!



I can already smell the feast waiting for us! Everyone knows the Pioneers are people of wealth and taste...



Don't be afraid! I'll pull you up!

You see? It was nothing, nothing at all...

My sweet little flower, I'll never abandon you!

We made it, Milena! We made it!

This time it was true. We had almost reached our goal. In less than an hour we would be at the top!



But poor, sad Giovanni, who dreamt of feasts and warm beds! He was, oh, so wrong, Elias!



*Nothing. No one.
No one...*

*No! There must be
someone. The last
keeper maybe. He
just can't hear us
because of all
these birds!*



*Stairs! Maybe
your answer
is at the top!*



*Come on,
Giovanni!
Courage!*



*She's got so much
Starmura! It'd be ironic
if I couldn't make it
to the top now!*





What? What's wrong?

I've seen all I need to. I think I'll wait here.



Don't go up, Giovanni!
I beg you!

I won't be long,
I promise.



I continued to climb, Elias, as if I hadn't already seen enough. As if there was still something to be hoped for from this tower and its accursed builders...



By the heavens!
What a mess!



I'd better watch what I'm doing. It's getting tight here!



It's a miracle that these stones are still holding together. Another minute and I'll be clear!



THE BASTARDS!





Elias was right! They lied to us! All this effort just to get to these few stories to this collapsed staircase...



YOU'RE BACK!
YOU'RE BACK!

I DON'T KNOW
WHAT TO SAY
MAGNA THE TOWER



I WAS SO SCARED,
GLOWRINI!



And that Elias is all that
remained for us that night...

• TO BE CONCLUDED... •

THE TOWER



IV
OF DREAMS,
STAR-GAZING, AND CERTAIN
OTHER THINGS ABOUT
WHICH DECENCY
REQUIRES DISCRETION

BY

SCHUITEN & PEETERS





My worst fears have been realized!

What
What is it?



We've just had a collapse
Just the thing I was afraid of!



The weather was too humid!
It was bound to happen!

yes! These sudden rapid changes
in the temperature were bound
to cause some distortion I've
always said

As far as I'm concerned,
this is all the fault of
those lazy keepers down
below. Those clods desert
their sectors the minute
there's any kind of
problem!



The idiots! If only they knew!
Let's go back Giovanni! Their
foolishness tires me!

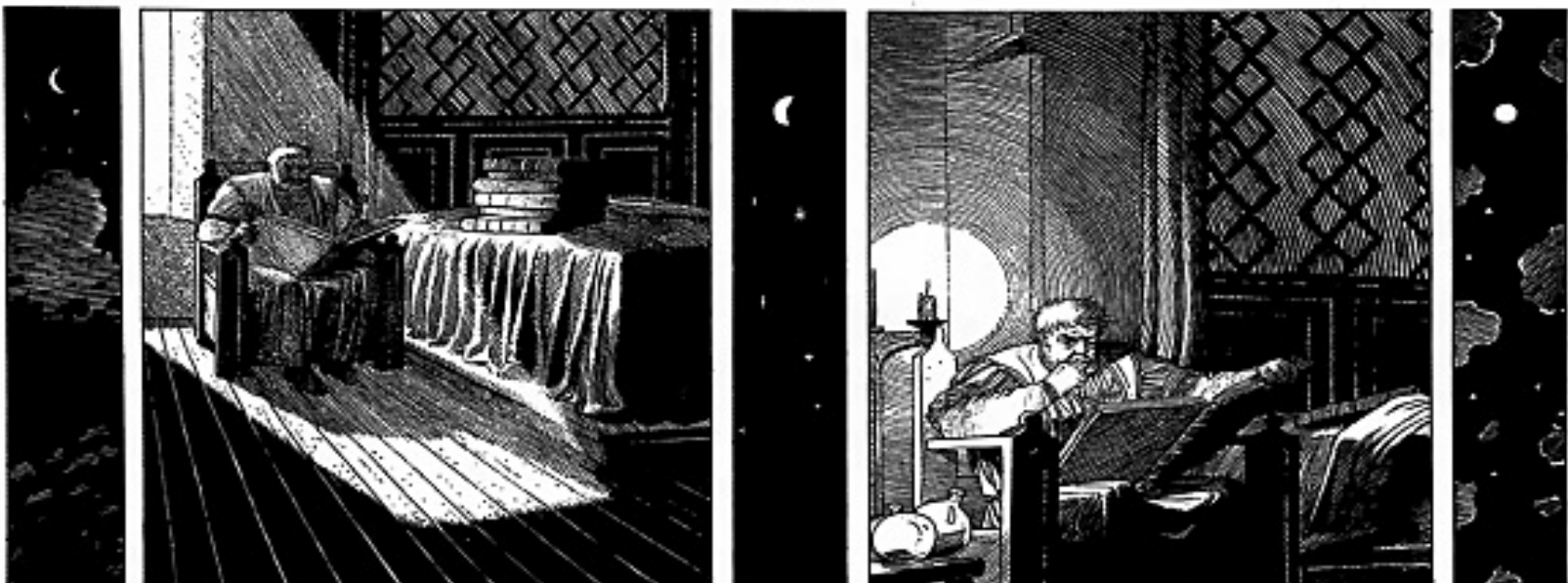


I've prepared a few books
for you I'm sure you'll find
them interesting



Is this all?

Of course, these are just the
basics. Once you've finished,
I'll give you others with
much more information!

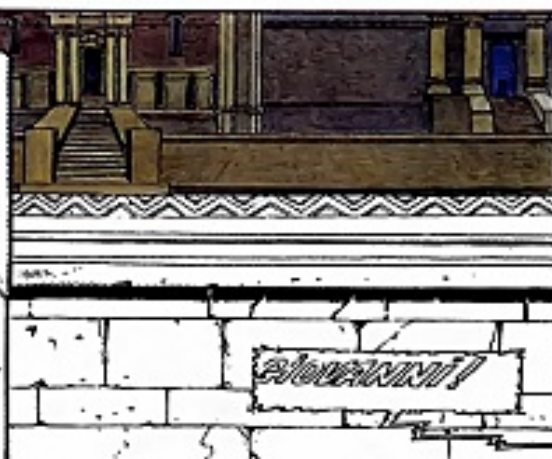


these minor towers were long believed to be mere legend.

But some credible travelers swore that they had seen them with their own eyes, and were able to describe them in minute detail: the massive tower of Urbis, the flying minarets of Alaxis, the curious belltower of Peza, and the high dungeons of Samaris.

It is especially important to cite the testimony of Nicolo Mafeo who, having traveled the entire continent from end to end, purported having beheld a gargantuan circular bridge linking several of these towers.

"The bridge is all of stone, at least eight feet wide and half-a-mile long. Just as I





Are you going deaf Giovanni?
I've called you three times!



What an idea he had, giving
you all those books. You've
done nothing else but read
for almost one moon now!



There are other things in
life than dusty old tomes.
The world isn't made of
essays and paintings!



There's something in these
paintings. How can I describe
it. Something that I've never
seen before.



Yes, yes, I know!



I find it incredible that I
spent so many years
repairing a section of the
Tower, yet knew nothing
about it.



There's nothing worse than would-be philoso-
phers! The devil take me if I ever thought
you'd end up being like this.



MILENA!

Leave me now!
And don't come
crawling back
after me!



Milena







Forgive me, Elias, I...

Don't apologize. I knew you would come looking for them eventually. Come with me, I've got something else to show you.



I don't think there ever were real blueprints for the Tower. The Tower's designers didn't even want any. Then...



Here! This is where I come every night. This is where I learned the foundations of my knowledge. Don't be afraid, look through the telescope!



OH!

The moon, Giovanni! Doesn't it look much closer when you see it thus? It's surface isn't smooth and polished like so many books claim it is. It's made of irregularities and rough spots, just like the surface of our own world.



If it wasn't you who showed me this, I wouldn't believe my own eyes!

But you must believe them, Giovanni! Now listen, I'm going to tell you the rest of what I know about the Tower...



The universe is made of four planes, Giovanni. The first is the material plane, the solid world in which we live. Most men have access only to this one. The second is the spiritual plane, that of our thoughts, our dreams and our desires...



The third is the astral plane, the one this telescope enabled us to observe. In the cosmic order, it is the equivalent of the material plane. Do you follow me, Giovanni?

Er, I think so.

The fourth is the divine plane. It's as unapproachable as the spiritual, and so far from us that it is even difficult to conceive...





Originally, the Tower was conceived to be a reflection of the universe. Building it was going to enable us to scale each plane, and thus gradually approach the Divine!

It was to become finer and purer as it got higher, freeing men from material weight, and cleansing them of all earthly stains. Thus one would reach the Soul of the Tower, the one true goal of this edifice!



That was the theory anyway. The explanations that the philosophers used to make themselves more easily understood. But it was terribly naive, a horrible misunderstanding, to actually build what should have remained an abstraction...





Building the Tower was as absurd as wanting to touch God! The distance between us and heaven is so vast that no matter how high we make the tower, it will never even come close to reaching it!

Are you sure?
Isn't the tower the closest thing that was ever built?

I'm sure it is, Giovanni, but the tower is nothing. It is less to the universe than a single stone is to the tower!

But if the builders were so wrong, what will become of us?



I don't know. Everything depends on the magnitude of the disaster. Have other men made the same mistake? Have they tried to build their own towers as many of the books suggest? Or are we the only ones to have become this obsessed? We don't know the answers, Giovanni, but we must certainly prepare ourselves for the worst!









Not like that
you're crushing me.



Oh, yes.



Oh, Giovanni.
Giovanni.



Wake up, Milena!
Elias saw us!



What's wrong with you, silly boots? He doesn't give a
fig! I've already told you he's not my father! Come
back here, otherwise I'd think you're trying to escape!







I'm worried about Elias. He seems so worried lately...



He's afraid of something. He's always going to the heart...

The heart?



yes, the center. If you keep going down after the paintings, you wind up at the center of the tower. That's where he goes to take measurements...



Come on! I want to see what's going on!

We've got to hurry. He's busy seeing clients...



It's in here. Be careful. The stones are slippery.



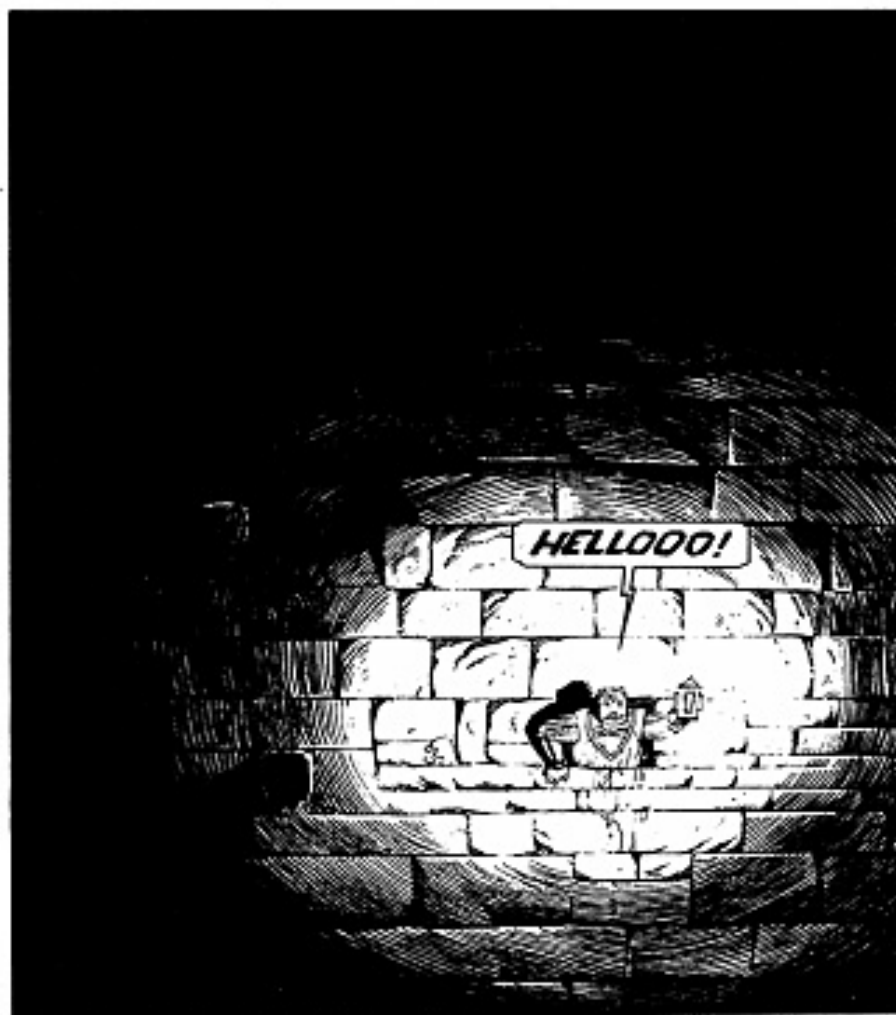
It looks endless. Are you sure it leads somewhere?

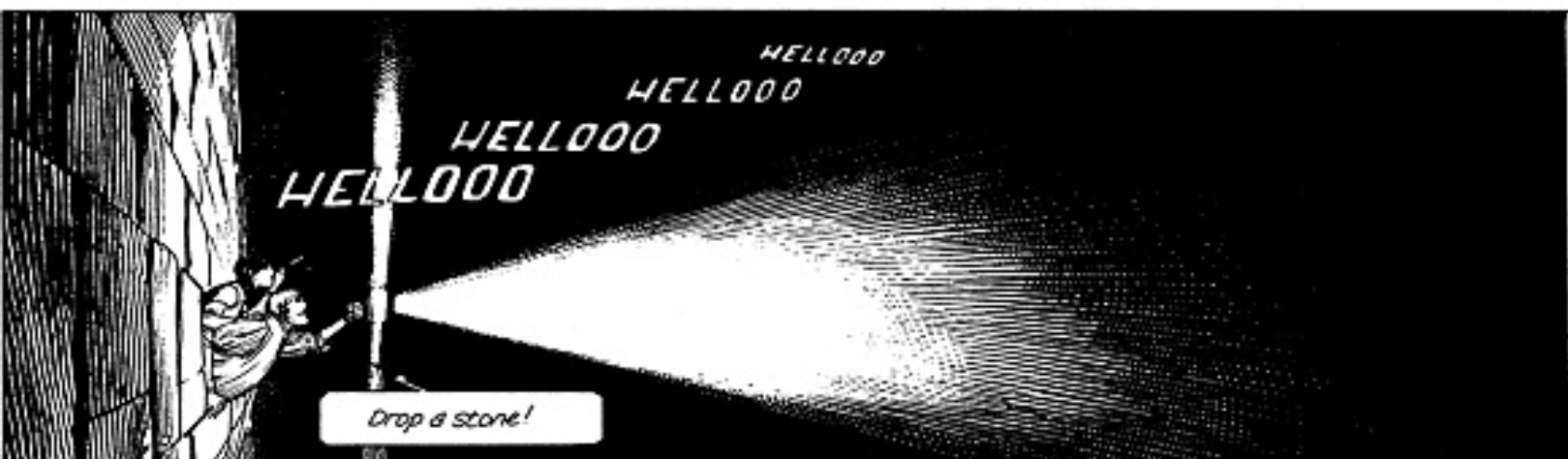
Absolutely! The tower is very deep you know.



It smells of rot in here! How could they neglect it to this point?







Drop a stone!



Nothing! Not the smallest sound!



It must be immense, absolutely immense! It's impossible to imagine.

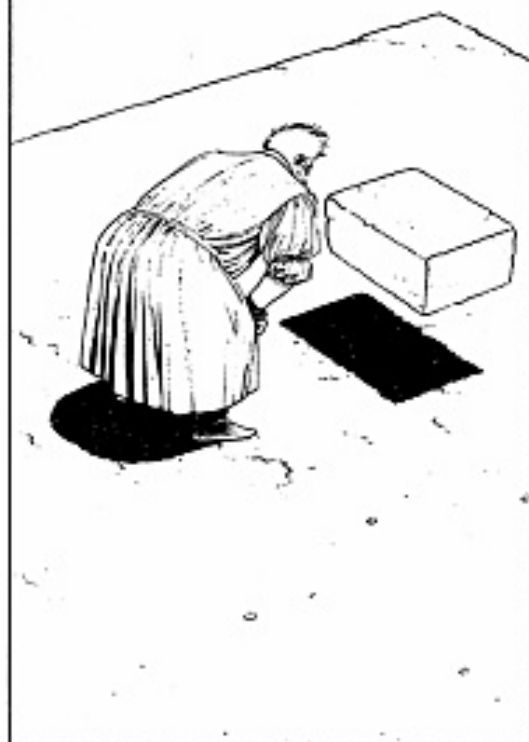


I know you're going to leave, Giovanni! I beg you! Take me with you!





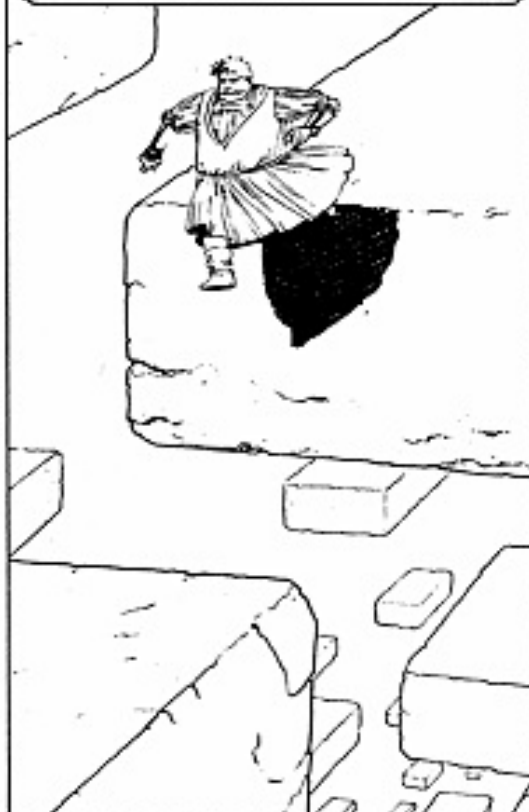
I was leaning over a huge stone that floated in the air.



Two enormous stones passed close to me. I understood that I had to go...



I was so light that I could jump easily, covering great distances...

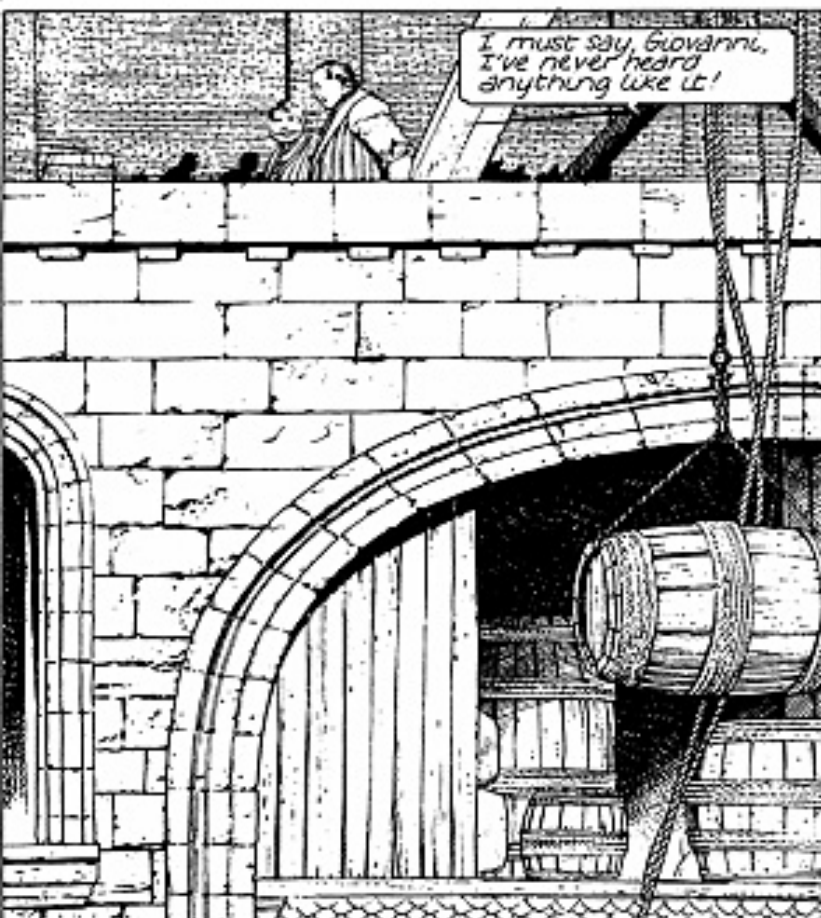


But the stones got farther and farther apart. In spite of my efforts, I knew I would soon fall into the emptiness...

A strange noise caused me to look up. Above me, thousands of stones had begun to move.



In mere seconds, I saw them come together and create the image of a frenetic tower, one that was headed straight at me, ready to crush me. That's when I woke up.



I must say, Giovanni,
I've never heard
anything like it!



I never used to dream.
Now this is the second
time in just a few
days you know the
key to dreams, Elias.
Tell me what mine
means!



Your dream only
confirms what I've
known for several
weeks. It's written
that a man would
cross the Tower from
top to bottom and
unveil its secrets. It's
funny that you're
the one whom fate
has chosen!



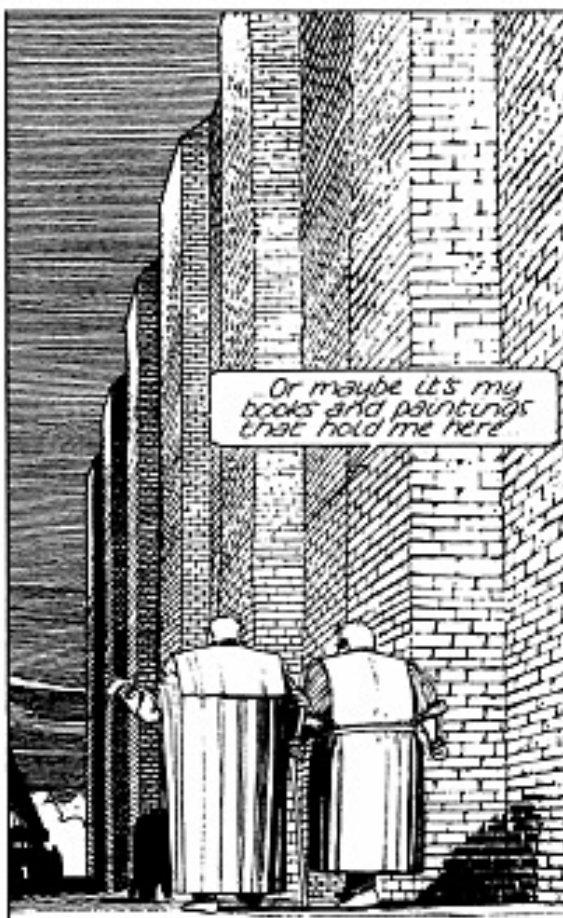
That's what the end of your dream
means-- that strange tower moving
towards you.



But Elias, you're the only
one that can uncover
the Tower's secrets.



No, Giovanni, things
aren't that simple.
Knowledge is not
enough. I'm too old,
too cynical, too
afraid to undertake
this journey.



Or maybe it's my
books and paintings
that hold me here.



Believe me, you're the one who will discover the truth. And I will learn it from your lips!

If I find anything out, I'll tell you immediately!

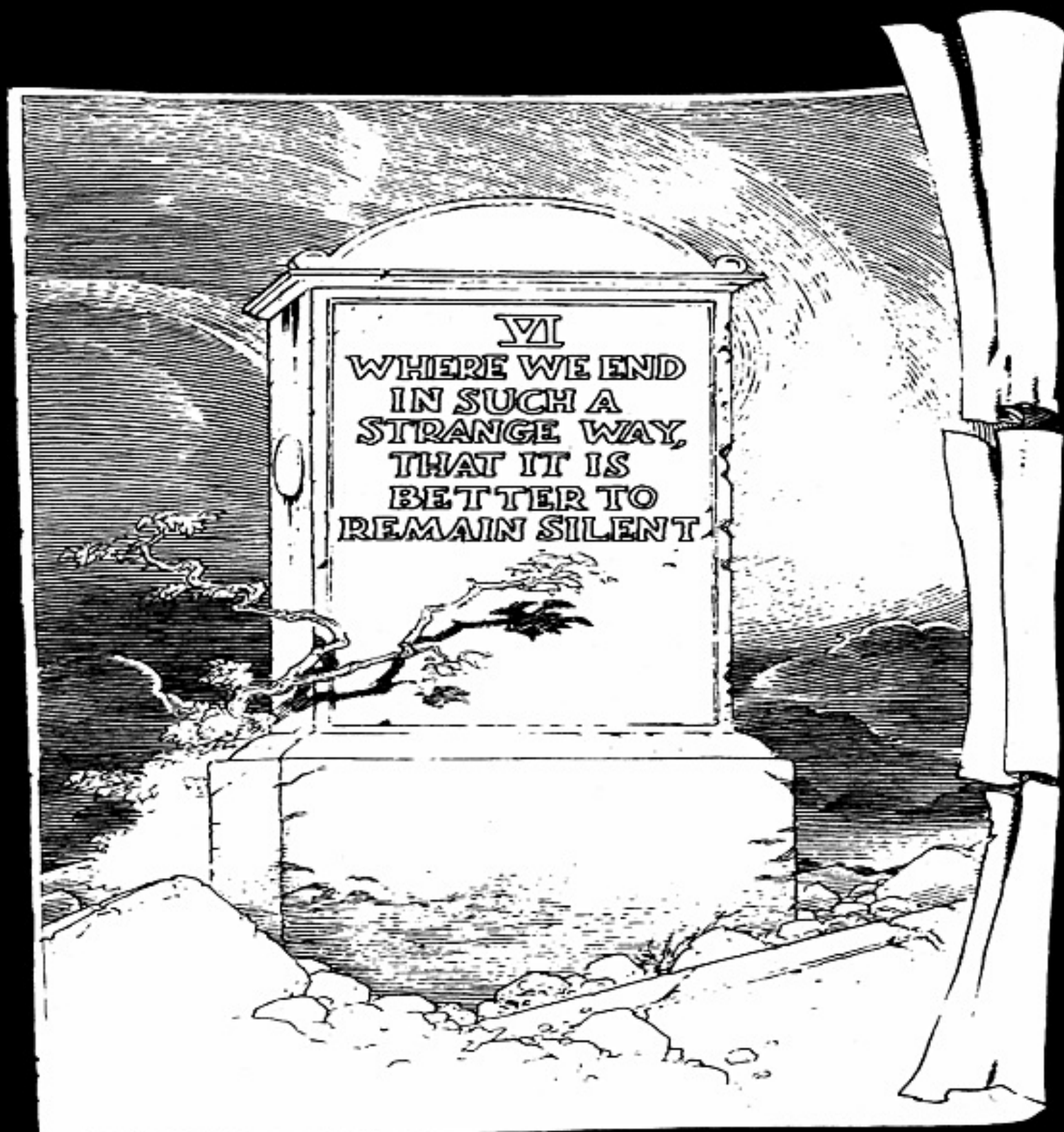
We've arrived at the edge of our sector. None of us has ever crossed it. Besides, we've never been able to observe anything from here.

It may be possible to pass over to the other side. At any rate, it will be less dangerous than getting back into one of those ridiculous flying machines!

You see, Elias I wouldn't have discovered even this path without you.

Stop it, Giovanni, before you begin spouting more nonsense...

THE TOWER



BY

SCHUITEN & PEETERS



What are we going to do now?

They must be somewhere. Follow me!



I swear, when I find them, I'll give them a piece of my mind!



We didn't know how much better off we were before.



They've all gone. ALL OF THEM! They left without a thought for the rest of us. But we'll do the same!



Still, it's strange, isn't it? Working all those years, then suddenly abandoning everything...



Funny, I can't hear the birds anymore!

My God! What the devil is that?



So, they were too greedy!
It looks like...



...Frames. Nothing
but frames!

The paintings must have
been important to them.
They couldn't bear to
leave them behind...



If they had left even
one, I wonder if all
our questions would
be answered...



Excuse me,
noble lord!

?



I am a prisoner, my
handsome master. Will
you deign to free me?

But, Milena, I... ha, ha... Coming my
princess! The ones who did this
to you had best quake in fear!



As we descended further, we discovered more belongings. Strange tools, heavy clothing and furniture, an abundance of goods—but alas, there was no sign of food.

What is it this time?



So?

Don't look! You've seen enough as it is! In any event, those so-called Pioneers didn't leave yesterday. Even if we'd come earlier, we still wouldn't have met them!



But... My God, Milena! It's gold! Gold!



Look at this decanter. It's beautiful!

But it didn't bring much luck to its owner. Come on, it's foolish to weigh ourselves down with junk!



Junk?!

The baggage became bigger and bigger obstructing the passage...

They must have been in an enormous panic to have left all their belongings and valuables behind. What could have come over them?



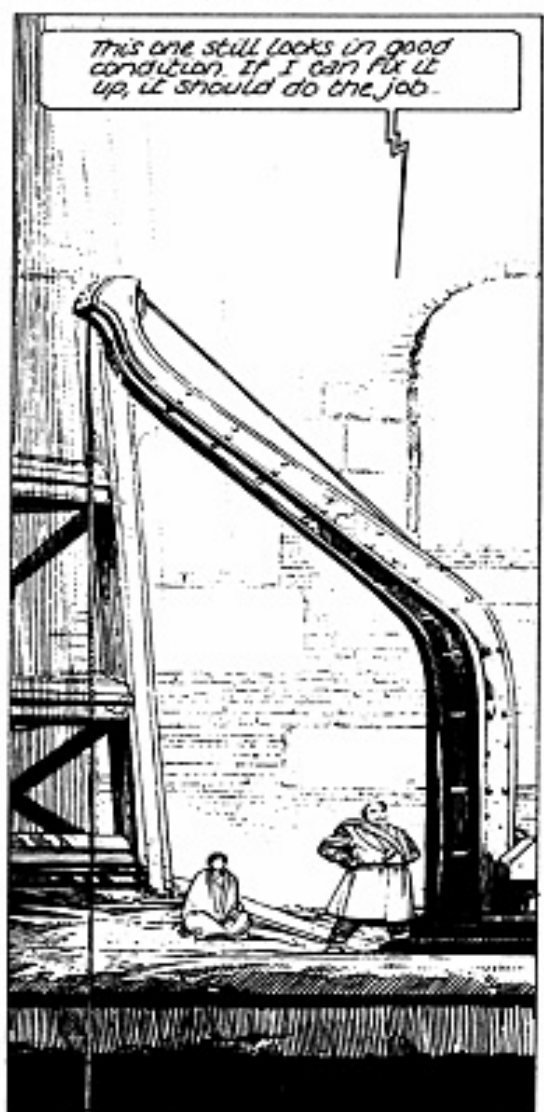
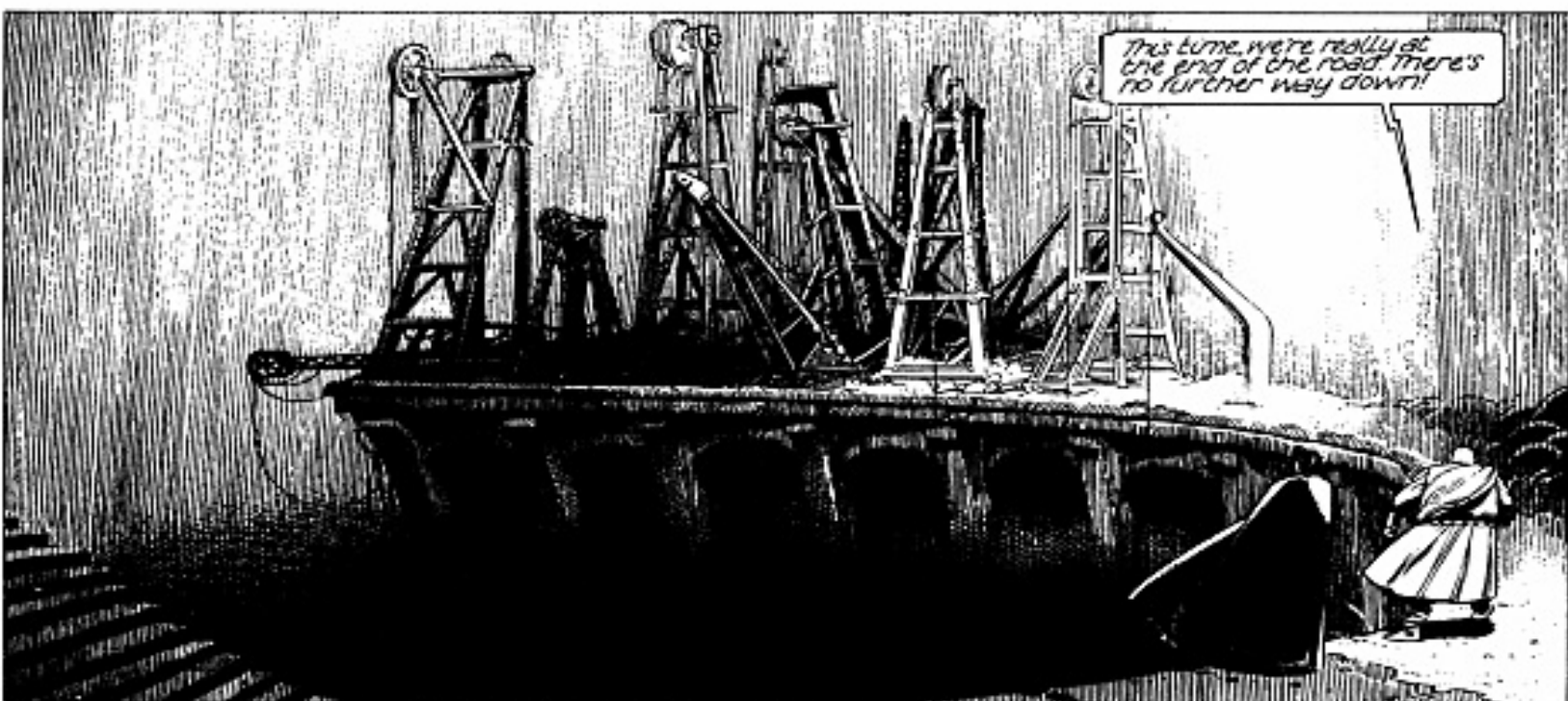
I'm a bit too heavy for this!



What fabric! I've never seen any so fine!

Bah! Leave it! It must be all eaten by moths.



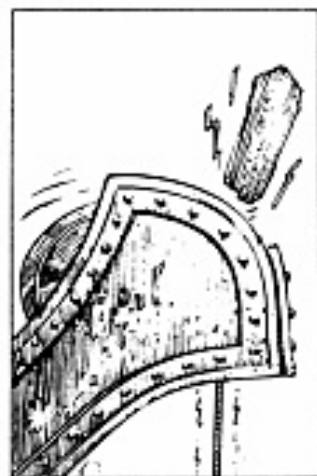






May God help us! At least we're in better shape than the tower itself.

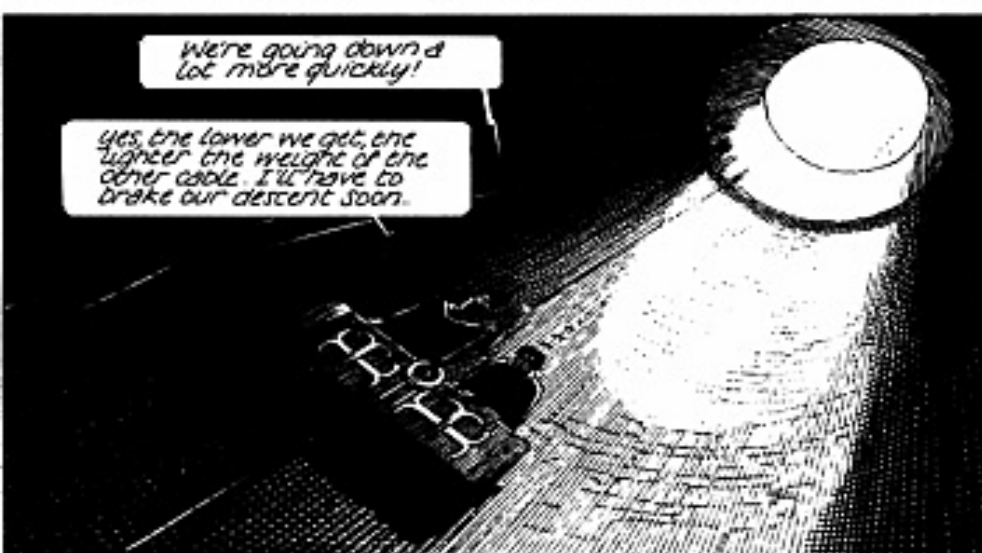
I hope you...



Congratulations! Just where do you expect us to go like this?

The cable's still a little too heavy. It's not surprising if it goes all the way to the bottom. Anyway, I can take care of it.

It's working! You see, all it needed was a little help.



We're going down a lot more quickly!

Yes, the lower we get, the lighter the weight of the other cable. I'll have to brake our descent soon.









What's going to happen now?

If the cable's too short, we'll stay suspended in the abyss. If it's too long, we'll be crushed!



We're almost at the bottom. Get ready!



There's no doubt about it. We took the same route as they.



This light has to come from outside. Let's go that way!



I never would have guessed it was so far...

Look! More frames! How many did they have?



Look, Milena, over there! Am I dreaming?



Incredible... I never hoped to see something like this again...



It's strange! Since I found this image, I suddenly feel more confident...

The paintings have always affected people like that. At Ellas, invalids were cured after seeing them.



The light's coming from over there. We'll be outside soon!

Finally! I wonder what we'll find this time?



Don't run, Milena!

I'm suffocating! I need air!



Wait for me! Wait for me!



Where are you, Milena?

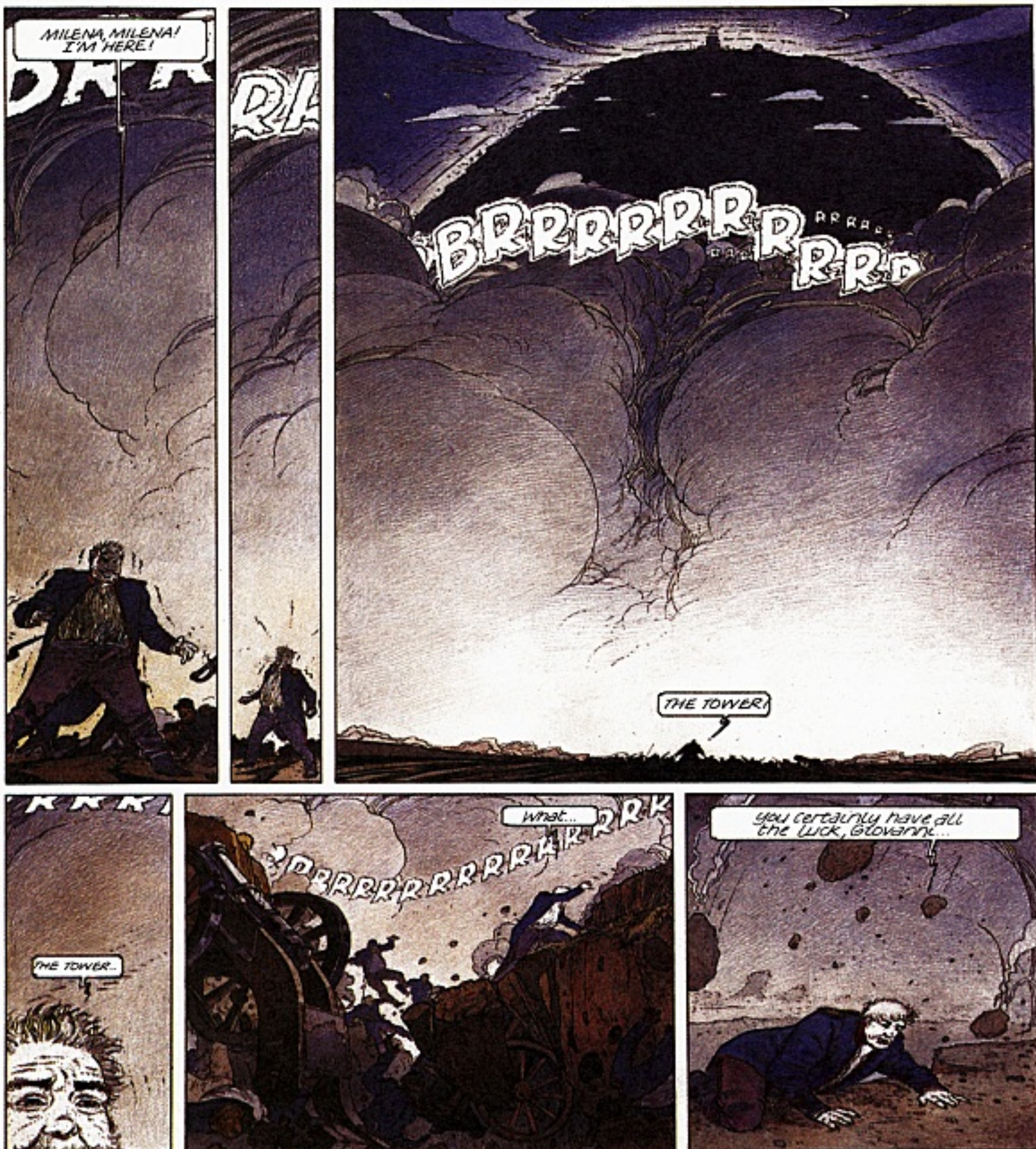


Dear Lord!
THE PAINTINGS!











They're coming!
We're lost!



Lost? Are you mad?



Don't run! We're going
to surround them!



You there! Take the left, towards
the platform! The rest of you,
follow me!



Forward! We'll show
these iconoclasts
a thing or two!



They're retreating, they've
had it... We'll rip them
limb from limb!



Tell me, you haven't seen a young
woman by chance? Actually, a
young girl... She's got curly hair
and... Answer me, it's important!



What's the matter with you? I'm
sure you must have seen her!



Come on! Show some courage!
Why are you all dawdling?

And you, talk, for heaven's
sake! Don't be scared...

MILLENNA!

I found her just when I had lost hope. How
could her uniform have fooled me so?

Milena...

We could have tried to escape. Yet we threw
ourselves wholeheartedly into this battle
that we didn't understand...

We led the ragged band of soldiers into combat.
We quitted, killed and sundered. We learned
to use the strange weapons that killed in
thunder and smoke...



WHERE ENDS
THE STORY OF
THE TOWER

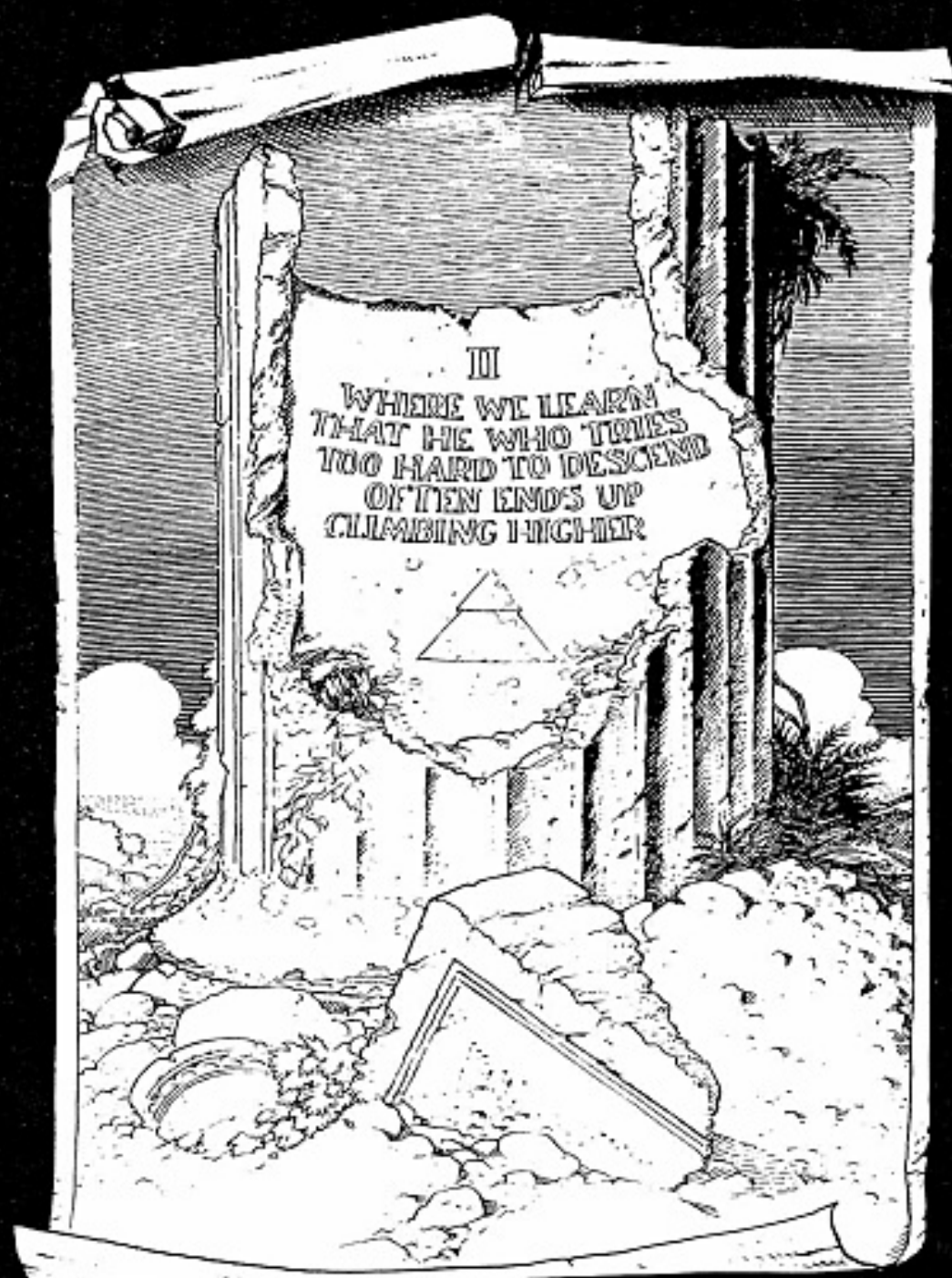
When we finally emerged from the battle, the soldiers carried us in triumph. I felt that we had already begun to meld into this world whose very existence we could not even have imagined only a few hours earlier...



There were days when the reality of the Tower hit me with an overwhelming and crushing power, others when it was lifted from my soul as if it had never existed. As if I myself began to believe it was merely a legend. But now I am weary. Reliving these memories has disturbed me more than I would have believed. Please, leave me alone now...

fin

THE TOWER



BY

SCHUITEN & PEETERS



Looks like I've
got everything...

Might as well
take a few more
flasks. It'll
keep me warm!

Now you ladies take
care of yourselves
without me. Don't worry,
I won't be gone long!

The most important thing's not
to get lost. The one time I did, I
thought I'd never get back to
my sector. There are too many
traps and dead ends. How am I
supposed to remember them all?

All this light! I'll
never get used to it!

No more
putting it off!



I wonder what's become of Horatio. It's been years since I've seen him.



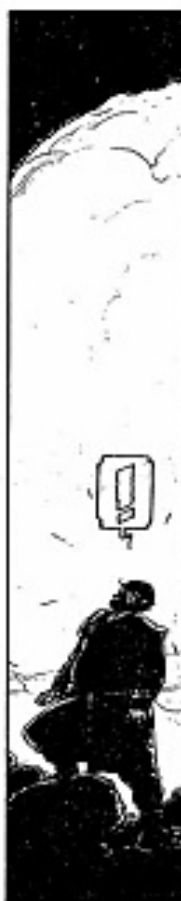
We used to run into each other all the time before... A long time ago.



It can't be much farther now. I won't be sorry to get there. Hope he's got the kettle on the fire!



I've gotten through the first leg without any problem! That deserves a drink!



!



What's going on? It looks like a horde of vandals was here since my last visit, Horatio!



HORATIO!
HORATIO!

Could he have
gone down too?



There're still embers in
the fireplace. He can't
be far.



HORATIO!



Horatio!



Why didn't you
answer, you old
fool? You've not
gone deaf, have you?



It's me, Giovanni!
Don't you remember
me? For heavens sake,
what's wrong? What
are you doing with
these shelves?



Get a grip on yourself,
old boy! The Inspector's
bound to come soon. Don't
you know what kind of a
report he'll give you, if he
finds your sector
like this?



Come along, Horatio,
buck up! All's not lost!
See here, I'll give
you a hand.



What a disaster! We'd be better off getting rid of the whole Tower and rebuilding it stone by stone! And that poor old fool just sits there building a gutter...



They want to kill me. Leave me to die with my feet in the water after using me up!



So, you haven't gone completely mute! You've got a turluy piece of your tongue left! Here, have a drink. It'll do you good!

They know that I know too much that I know them as if I'd made them myself!



Their conspiracies, their plots, their deceptions. None of it has escaped me! They wanted to get me out of the way. They hoped I'd go crazy. But they won't be rid of me that easily!



I'll drown them all. I swear it! They'll see more water than if they were on the Silent Sea. The Flood! That's what I'm fixing for them! THE FLOOD!



All the streams of the Great Abyss will swell, and the dams of the skies will open. The waters will cover the highest mountains, and all who are below will drown in its torrent!



All the creatures who live upon the earth, and, yea, the Tower itself will be washed away!

He's gone mad! Might as well keep moving...



you're going down? You plan to tell them everything! I knew it! But spies like you don't worry me. You'll die like all the rest!

Poor Horatio! To think that I had the idea we could go down together...

I've got to take this ledge. It's the only practical route that I know, but it means a detour.

When the Inspector comes, he'll have a lot to do. No wonder he's late. If all the sectors are like this, it's sad to say, but I've got the feeling there are some keepers who are going to be hired...

OH, NO!



*Bleah!
What muck!*



*What kind of
hole did I
fall into?*

*Looks like he wasn't as
lucky as I was. And
they say being fat's bad!*



*I can't just leave
him hanging there...*



*He's been dead for
a long time. I'm
going to end up
missing my sector
after all...*



*He doesn't need
this anymore,
poor bugger...*



*On the other
hand, there's a
good chance
I will!*



*Et in nomine patris et filii
et spiritus sancti, amen!*



*I'd better find
this fellow's house.
In the state I'm
in, I don't have
much choice...*





Ah! There's that damn cabin!



Not exactly worth the trip!



Let's face it, this does not look good. I can't go any further down without breaking my neck. Should I go back up? NEVER! I haven't put myself through all of this to give up now! Ah, if only I could fly like they do...



Fly? Why the devil not? All I have to do is catch a few and...



Come on, you little! Don't run away!



Ah! I've got one!



ARGH!



Damn birds! It probably wouldn't have worked anyway! Too bad. Might as well sleep...





What a night! All this filth! I wonder how long those stinking rags have been marinating in their own muck? I've got to get out of here before I wind up rotting here!



But how? I wish I had wings! What I need is a contraption that can slow down a belly like mine... Something like one of those big kites they used in the old days to lower the stones...



What were they like again? It's all so long ago. I should have paid more attention... But it's worth a try anyway!



These bamboo rods will never hold someone as fat as me!



Say, that's not too bad! Now, for the sails!



I hope there's enough here. My sails are going to have to be big.



Have I lived this long to go risk my neck in a basket? To throw myself to the winds like just another dead leaf? Ah, Giovanni, are you that tired of life?

But damn these morbid thoughts! My contraption's going to work fine! I feel it! Besides, it's too late to backtrack now!

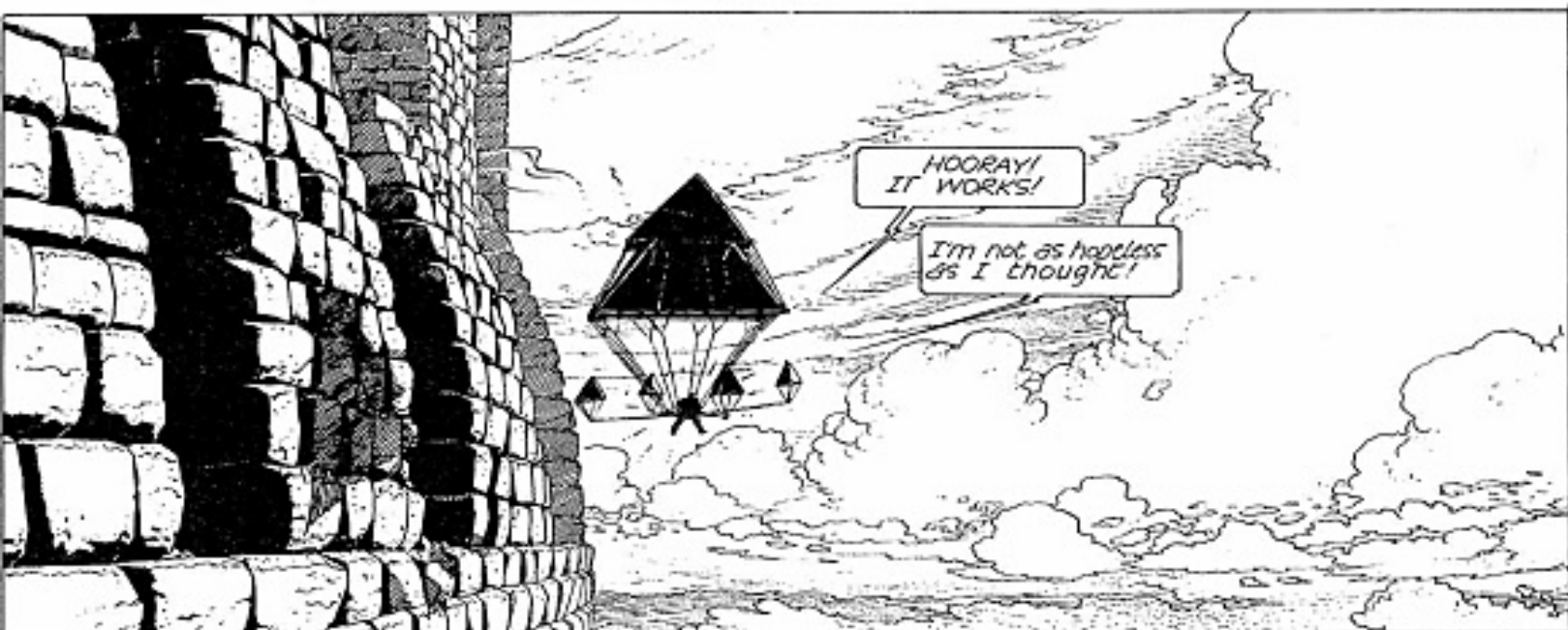
Another few knots and I'm done! Not bad for a beginner!

That's it! It's over! This is the best I can do!

The wind's in my favor. It's now or never!

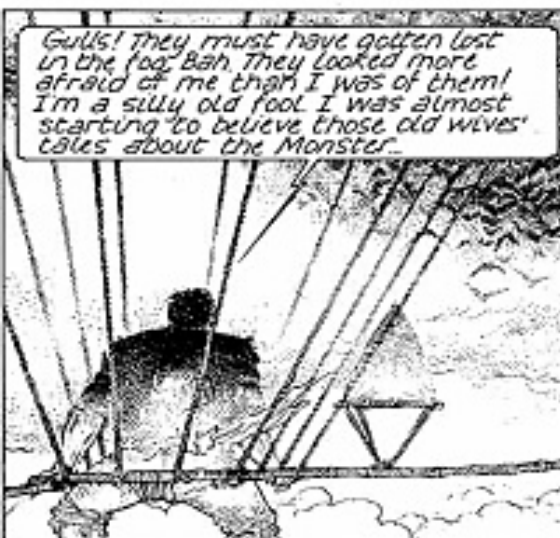
May God look favorably upon me!

!?

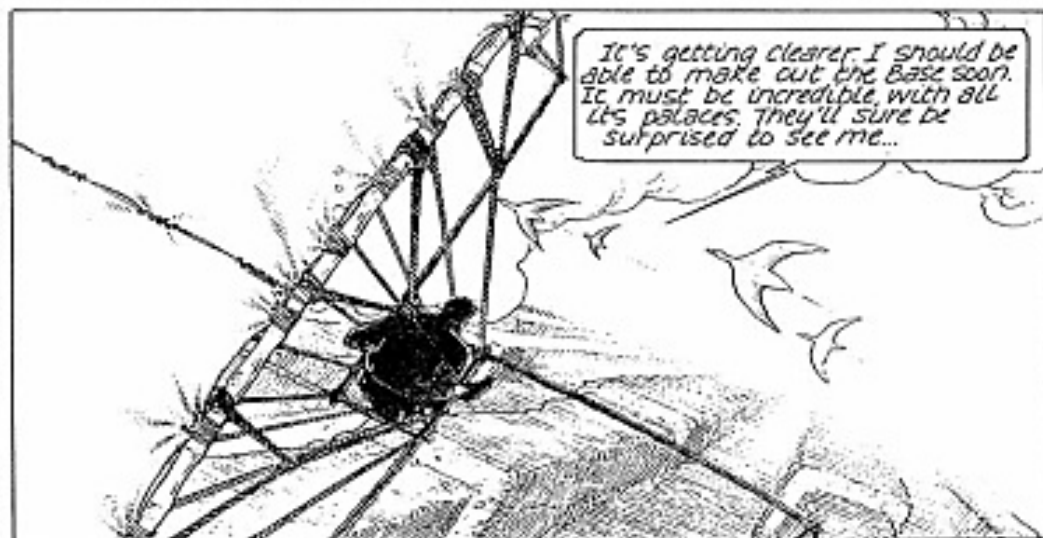




Get away from me!
Get away, I said!



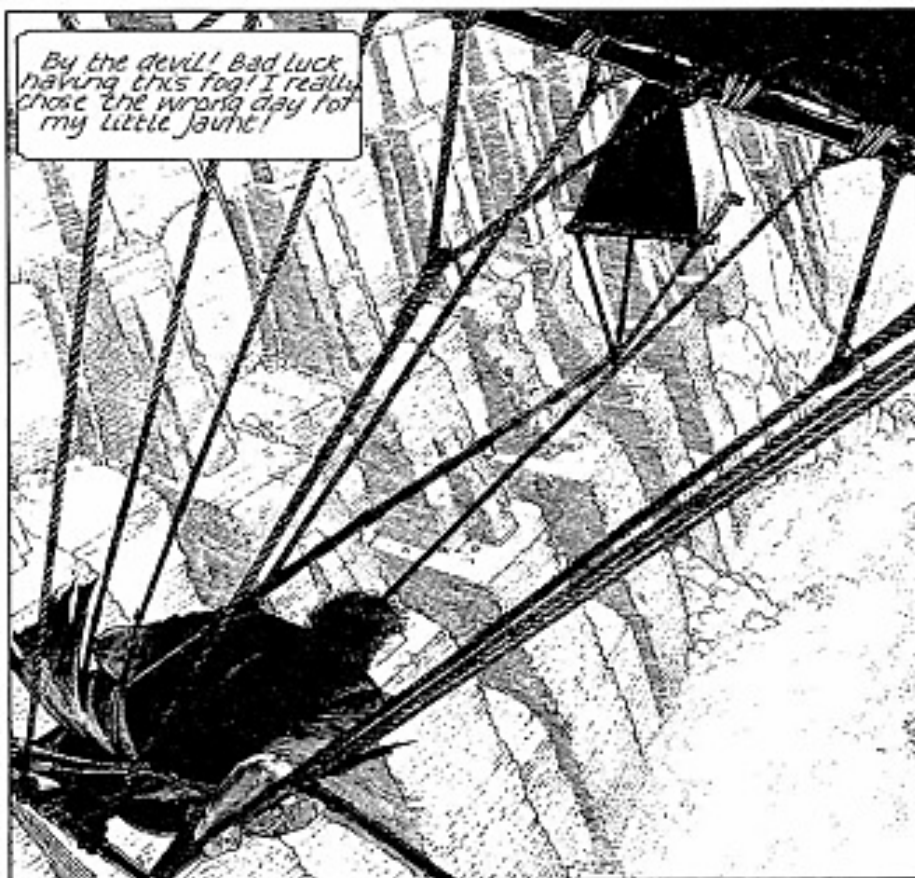
Gulls! They must have gotten lost
in the fog. Bah. They looked more
afraid of me than I was of them!
I'm a silly old fool. I was almost
starting to believe those old wives'
tales about the Monster.



It's getting clearer. I should be
able to make out the Base soon.
It must be incredible, with all
its palaces. They'll sure be
surprised to see me...



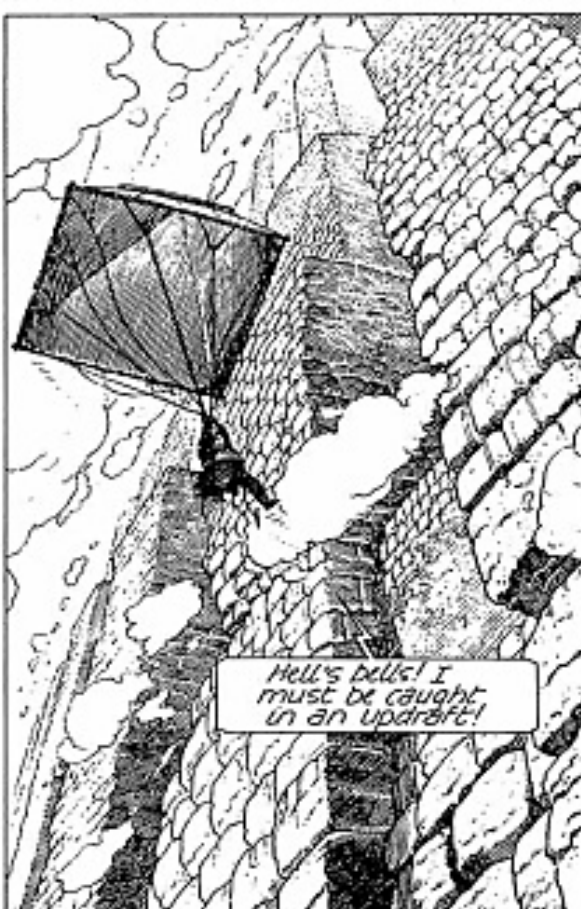
This view reminds me
of something I must
have been here before,
with the others. That
was such a long time
ago, when I was seven
or eight. Hard to
believe...



By the devil! Bad luck
having this fog! I really
chose the wrong day for
my little jaunt!



What's happening
now? Keep steady,
old girl!





Blast, but it's pulling hard! If this keeps up, I'm going to melt away! On top of that, I've got nothing to drink...



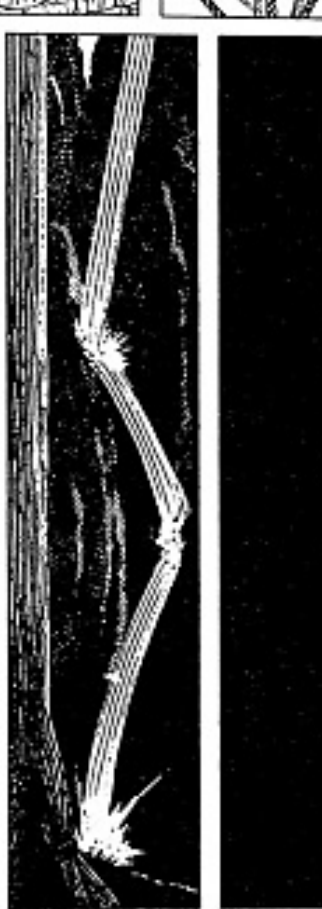
I don't recognize a thing now. I must have passed my sector a long time ago. At this speed, I should be near the top soon. Let's pray I don't pass it! That'd be dramatic!



Oh, my God, no!



Giovanni, old man, looks like this is it!



• TO BE CONTINUED... •